

the chronicle

Does he bite? Meet Dudley museum's fearsome attraction

- see page 3



Hoping for a touch of drama with spotlight on drive for members

- see page 7



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Car users at hospital still block the streets

STAFF at a Black Country hospital are continuing to clog surrounding streets with cars despite the opening of a new 691-space car park at the site, residents claim.

People living near Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley, say workers are blocking nearby roads with their cars for up to 12 hours at a time, leaving residents unable to park outside their own homes.

It had been hoped that the hospital's new £6 million staff car park, which opened in December, would help to resolve the problem of on-street parking.

But last week, residents claimed the multi-storey had not made any difference. At Brierley Hill Area Committee, they told councillors that vehicles were still being left in Poets' Corner, Tennyson Street, Milton Street and Byron Street.

They want the council to be stricter on issuing parking tickets to Russells Hall workers causing problems in streets around the hospital.

Dudley Council director of urban environment John Millar said he would look into the issue and contact the hospital.

• Car park spaces - Page 3

Insight into a glittering past

TALES of Stourbridge's waterways and their links to the town's world famous glass industry will be told by a renowned canal expert.

Writer and broadcaster Graham Fisher MBE will host a walking series - Jewels on the Cut. Walks will take place on April 30, May 22, June 25, July 24 and August 29.

Mr Fisher has also written a book to accompany the walks. For details or to book telephone 01384 812745.

First phase of hall rebuild is complete

THE first phase of restoration work has been completed on Corngreaves Hall as part of a £3 million project to bring the building back into use.

The Grade II-listed building in Bradley Heath, dating back to 1780, has been empty for the last 60 years, with more than £1m of damage caused by vandals and lead thieves. It is now being developed into homes from Worcester-based GR8 Space.

Plasterer found safe

A SELF-EMPLOYED plasterer from Quarry Bank who went missing has been found by police. Andrew Moore, aged 40, was last seen leaving his home at 6.30am last Thursday. He was found safe and well at 12.30pm on Saturday by officers from West Mercia Police in his car on the A491.

STAFF CLAMOUR FOR EXIT PAY-OFF

MORE than 1,100 staff at Dudley Council have applied for voluntary redundancy, it has emerged. And new figures show the authority could have to pay up to £6 million this year to cover the cost of workers leaving.

More than 400 posts are due to go in the next few months under council plans to axe a total of 800 over the next three years. The authority needs to save £22m between April this year and March 2012.

The council has been accepting applications for voluntary redundancy as part of its cost-cutting plans.

New figures revealed this week show that 1,128 requests for voluntary redundancy were received by February 2.

However, 535 have been turned down on the basis that the council cannot lose the posts.

Some 325 requests have been deemed "acceptable" and are currently being progressed with the workers concerned.

Another 268 will undergo further consideration before council bosses decide whether they can lose the positions. Bosses say that in a number of departments, too many volunteers have come forward, which has led to "selection pools" being established to determine who is most suitable to go.

Compulsory

A report which was due before the council's cabinet yesterday (Wednesday) says it is likely that some compulsory redundancies will still be required.

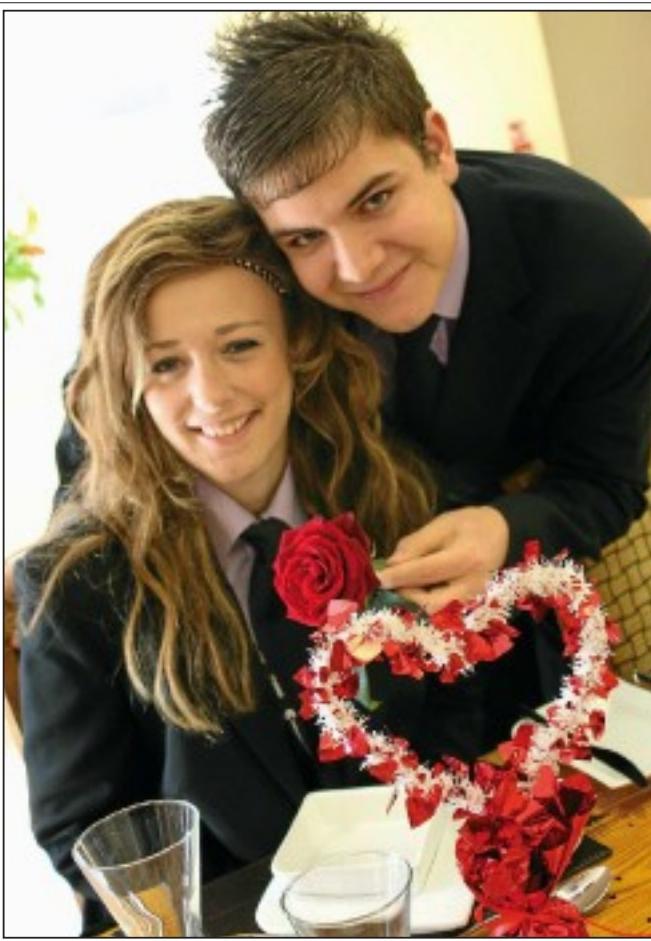
Council spokesman Chris Howes said: "We are unable to put a cost on redundancies at this stage but we have built in an allowance into our budget to borrow up to £6m to cover any eventual costs."

The money will cover the cost of those who go during this financial year.

A decision on successful applications will be made by March 31 while any further compulsory redundancies will be announced by May 31. Staff have also been offered the chance to reduce their working hours to help cut the number of job losses.

Meanwhile, Staffordshire County Council is planning to shed up to 500 jobs to cope with Government cuts.

South Staffordshire Council launched a voluntary redundancy scheme last year.



Catering students Henrietta Norton-Kent and Daniel Clarke help promote Valentine's day

Cupid offers tasty dishes

LOVE will be in the air at Halesowen College when catering students hold a romantic Valentine's night celebration.

A special hearts and flowers menu is on offer on February 14 in the training restaurant at the Birmingham Road campus.

The menu includes starters of crispy chicken sausage on a bed of buttered leeks and herb dressing and vegetable terrine served with a red pepper coulis.

Main courses on offer will be monkfish and scallops in a lime leaf, chilli and coconut sauce on a bed of thai noodles or herb crusted roast best end of lamb with redcurrant jus as well as a selection of desserts.

Students plan the menu, prepare the food as well as organise the service and decorate the restaurant. Call the booking centre on 0121 602 7799 to reserve a place.

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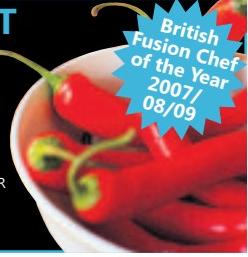
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It's flaming chips again for fireman's last shout

AFTER 30 years service, firefighter Jon Mucklow was more than prepared to tackle flames when his crew got an "emergency" call to a chippie.

But the shout to Ivan's Chip Shop, in Reddal Hill Road, Cradley Heath, was in fact a smokescreen for a surprise retirement party.

The Bradley crew commander was all smiles when he was instead treated to a fish and chip supper at the chippie in to mark his last shift with green watch.

Jon said: "This is amazing. I had no idea they were planning this. The station is only about 300 yards down the road and I was worried we wouldn't get our breathing gear on before we pulled up outside. This is really good – they got the good and proper." He was escorted on the call-out by colleagues Rudy Parkes,

Skinner is frank on challenge

BLACK Country comedian Frank Skinner today spoke of his bid to help raise more than £1 million for Comic Relief.

Skinner, along with Stephen Fry, Jimmy Carr and Al Murray, are doing battle with their own limited edition Walkers crisps flavours, with 5p from every pack for the charity.

The comedian whose flavour raises the most money wins, while the losing three will be waxed in public by TV presenter Denise Van Outen.

Baggies fan Skinner, from Oldbury, whose flavour is Frank Roast Dinner, said: "The big upside of this is that Walkers will give five pence for every bag sold to Comic Relief."

Daughter

Jon served with the Royal Engineers in Northern Ireland and Germany after signing up, aged 16, straight from school in Halesowen where he grew up.

Rudy, green watch commander, said: "Jon has been a true firefighter right to his last shift."

The father-of-two served at Highgate and Woodgate Valley stations, in Birmingham, before being promoted to Bradley 15 years ago.

Jon was joined at the party last week by wife Michaela, daughter Briony, aged 21, her partner Simon, 24, son Sam, 12, and two-week-old granddaughter Maisey.



Jon with family members, colleagues and chip shop staff



Jon Mucklow arrives at the surprise party



Wife Michaela greets her surprised husband

Ancient market to get £6m facelift

DUDLEY'S ailing market place will be given a £6million facelift aimed at attracting more shoppers to the town. A bid for funding is being drawn up.

Stalls will be given a revamp and the ageing toilet block removed to create an unobstructed view across the town to Dudley Castle.

The town's 19th century fountain, which has fallen into disrepair, will also be restored to its former glory as part of the proposals being drawn up by Dudley Council.

A funding appeal for half of the £3m needed to get the project off the ground will be submitted to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Funding

The money will help council planners to finalise the scheme in time to attract further funding.

Deputy Council leader Councillor Les Jones said: "We need to secure the funding. We will then hold a consultation with the market traders."

Market trader David Flavell, aged 50, who has run his fruit and veg stall for 14 years, welcomed the news but feared it would not be enough to boost trade. "If the council wants to boost trade we need free car parks and incentives to get the bigger shops in," he said.

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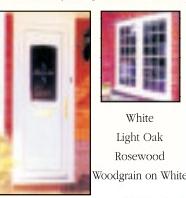
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Service is hit by weighty problem

MORE than £300,000 has been spent on specialised ambulance equipment to cope with the increasing number of obesity cases in the West Midlands.

West Midlands Ambulance Service has bought four specialist bariatric ambulances – vehicles with extra wide ramps and strengthened floors – to ferry the heaviest patients around.

Figures released under the Freedom of Information Act reveal the vehicles can cost up to £90,000 each.

They are equipped with double-width trolley stretchers which cost up to £10,000 each and are able to support patients weighing up to 50 stone.

Cushions

They also feature hoists and inflatable lifting cushions, which cost around £2,500.

If the ambulances have their tail-lifts reinforced, that costs an additional £800. Meanwhile, standard ambulances are being equipped with heavy-duty wheelchairs, stretchers and lifting cushions.

Ambulance trusts across the country are facing a similar expense. Every trust in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland has confirmed the changes. Jo Webber, director of the Ambulance Service Network, said ambulance bosses had been left with no option.

Hospital car park short on spaces, claims union

DUDLEY'S main hospital is 200 car parking spaces short of the minimum number it needs for workers following controversial changes, union of officials fear.

Unison says there are not enough spots for all of the staff who would qualify for a parking pass at Russells Hall Hospital.

But the hospital trust, which runs the site, said it was still assessing how many spaces were required. Bosses are now arranging meetings with staff to get their

views next month. Passes will then be issued to staff according to new criteria.

Assessments will include how far workers live from the site and how often they need to use their car during the course of the working day.

There are 1,123 staff spaces at the site including 691 at the multi-storey car park.

More than 3,000 workers had applied for permits for Russells Hall and the Guest Hospitals in Dudley and the Corbett Hospital in Stourbridge.

All applicants have been granted temporary access to the car parks while arrangements are finalised. But Unison representative Tracy Wood said she had been told there was a shortfall of 200 spaces.

"I have been told they are 200 spaces short for the staff so at the moment it is still free for all," she said.

Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust chief executive Paula Clark, said: "We are carrying out capacity exercises on different days over a number of weeks to assess what the requirement is. When we have finished this exercise we will then be able to consider any shortfall."

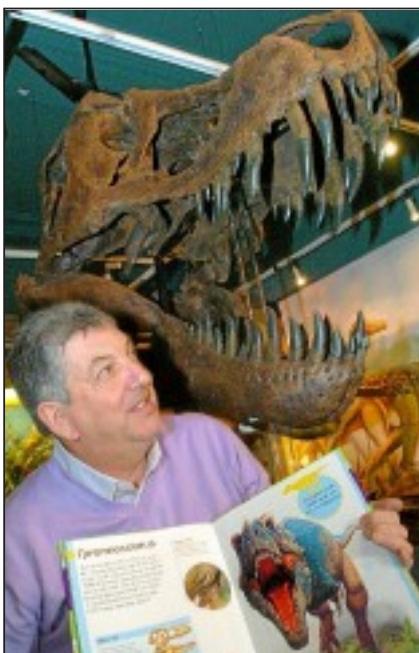
Regulations

The new parking arrangements were thrown into chaos after private firms, which run some hospital services, said they would not be able to apply the new rules to their workers.

Bosses are still working to resolve the issue.

The trust says it has been forced to restrict parking spaces to one for every four workers due to council regulations when it applied for planning permission for the new multi-storey in 2008.

Museum's T-rex skullduggery



Operations manager John Billingham with the new *Tyrannosaurus rex* head casting

PROBLEMS at a Black Country traffic blackspot are poised to improve with the overhaul of a nightmare junction.

Drivers have been putting their lives at risk performing dangerous right-hand turns into the Lidl supermarket in Blackheath from Archer Way after a central reservation was installed.

The reservation, put in when the store was built, has also led to tailbacks.

Now the discount chain is to team up with transport chiefs to change the layout, foiting the bill of tens of thousands of pounds itself.

Blackheath councillor Mary Docker is among those who have been voicing her concerns to the Highways Department since Lidl opened.

Reviewed

Despite the central reservation being brought in to prevent cars from turning right into the store, motorists have continued to ignore the rules.

It is understood the scheme has been in the pipeline for a year and the costs of removing the reservation and realigning the access to the store to create a new right hand turn will not cost Sandwell Council tax-payers a penny.

Councillor Docker said: "Lidl have reviewed the current arrangements and the proposal is to remove the existing central reservation and redesign the entrance to Park Street so that a right turn can be made into Park Street from Archer Way."

Centro budget slashed by £3m

MORE than £3 million is to be slashed off the budget for public transport this year. Centro, which was set up by the councils of the West Midlands to oversee public transport and pay for travel for pensioners and the disabled, will see its budget cut from £153.7m to £150m in 2011-12.

Bosses are now trying to bring in savings including cutting the £12.4m a year cost of running Ring and Ride services for the elderly and disabled by £930,000.

Disused house set to be razed

A HOUSE just yards from Broadfield House Glass Museum in Kingswinford will be demolished to make way for a new housing development.

The house, off Barnett Lane, is derelict.

Developer Kendrick Homes was successful in gaining permission to tear down the disused property and clear the site. In its place, six four-bedroom houses will be built. A

number of mature trees and part of an existing boundary wall will be retained.

Councillors had insisted that clauses were inserted into the planning permission to make sure that the trees and the wall were protected.

Planning committee member Councillor Geoffrey Southall said the wall gave the area "character" and "should not be taken down for the sake of it".

The new parking arrangements were thrown into chaos after private firms, which run some hospital services, said they would not be able to apply the new rules to their workers.

Bosses are still working to resolve the issue.

The trust says it has been forced to restrict parking spaces to one for every four workers due to council regulations when it applied for planning permission for the new multi-storey in 2008.

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CDs sound Last Post for buglers

THE bugle call has played a key part in military ceremonies for centuries—but now veterans are using recordings because of a shortage of musicians.

The problem is so widespread that manufacturers have started to make electronic versions of the classic bugle, which can blast out The Last Post and Reveille.

The new device looks like a real bugle but is operated by simply pressing a button.

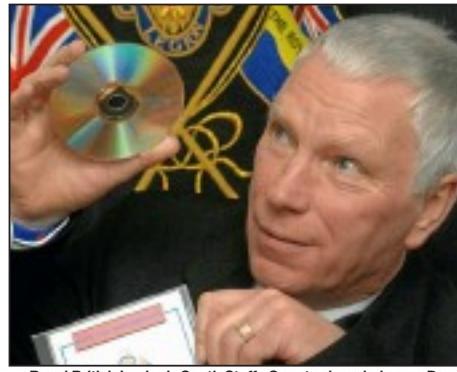
The Dudley branch of the Royal British Legion, based in Hall Street, has been awarded a £3,000 grant by the local area committee, some of which will be used to purchase one of the new electronic bugles.

Difficult

Mike Morris, chairman of the South Staffordshire legion, which covers Wolverhampton, Walsall, and most of Sandwell and Dudley, said qualified buglers were becoming scarce.

"It is a problem affecting branches across the region. I have a CD of The Last Post which I use at church services and things like that at the Penn branch."

The Dudley branch chairman, Councillor Malcolm Davis, said



Royal British Legion's South Staffs County vice-chairman, Derrick Morton with a CD of the Last Post

the number of occasions where the military music was played far exceeded the number of available buglers. Good bugle players are difficult to get hold of.

"We do a lot of memorial funerals for soldiers who want military honours when they die, as well as for services of Remembrance."

Quarry Bank branch events organiser Gloria Donovan said they were fortunate to know a bugler who performed at Remembrance services. At other times, including military funerals, they have to take a CD or a tape.

"I think an electronic bugle is a wonderful idea," she said.

Anger as flytipping attracts vermin

RESIDENTS are campaigning for action over a derelict site in Dudley which they say has become a magnet for fly tippers and anti-social behaviour.

They say it is becoming a health hazard as vermin and foxes are being attracted by the piles of rubbish.

A row of six garages in Leabank Road, Netherton, was demolished after being repeatedly attacked by arsonists. The Dudley council-owned area has been fenced off, but there is no sign of it being cleared.

Anne Gregory, aged 54, of Heath Road, said she feared her property was being devalued by the mess.

Regularly

She said: "We have been calling for this to be re-developed since 2008. It's horrible having rats and mice scurrying around outside your house."

"We often hear smashing glass and shouting around the back, and the piles of rubbish are disgusting."

Dudley Council spokeswoman Katherine Finney said: "The site has been declared surplus to the council's requirements and the authority is currently considering selling the land."

"The site is inspected regularly and reports of fly tipping can be made to Dudley Council Plus."

Library closes doors for redecoration

A LIBRARY in Dudley has closed for a week as the building is redecorated.

New self-service equipment and a front desk, costing £13,500, are being installed at Sedgley Library. Walls are being given a fresh lick of paint and new carpets laid as part of the improvement work.

The library, in Ladies Walk, Sedgley, is due to reopen this Saturday, February 12.

Dudley Council's cabinet

member for housing, Councillor David Simms, said: "It's great to see improvements being made to the library which will make it a more welcoming environment for visitors."

The redecoration is being carried out and paid for by the company which owns the Ladies Walk building, as part of a Private Finance Initiative agreement with the council.

Councillor Simms said the council was taking the opportunity during the closure to introduce new self-service equipment to free up staff time to serve visitors to the library.

In the meantime borrowers have been advised that can go to nearby libraries in Dudley, Coseley and Gornal.

Cradley Library, in Colley Lane, Cradley, is due to reopen on Monday, February 14, after a month-long refurbishment project and essential repair works costing almost £20,000.

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Employees at Co-Op Logistics raising money for the Air Ambulance at a monthly golf event

STAFF from a Halesowen distribution company have celebrated a year of fundraising by donating more than £1,000 to a rapid response charity.

Co-op Logistics, which has a frozen food depot on Amber Way, handed over the cheque to Midlands Air Ambulance after taking part in a variety of fundraising activities during 2010.

Around 250 depot employees took part in monthly golf competitions, a sponsored car wash, a World Cup barbecue and several coffee and cake mornings.

The majority of the money was raised through an annual December raffle which gave participants the chance to win a

signed England rugby shirt and an Aston Villa stadium tour.

A total of £1274.81 was donated to Midlands Air Ambulance with nearly £200 coming from the sale of the charity's merchandise.

Delighted

Lisa Cappetta, training coordinator at Co-Op Logistics, said: "We had a vote at the beginning of last year amongst all the employees and it was decided that Midlands Air Ambulance would be our charity of choice.

"With it being a local charity it received total support and I'm delighted to be able to hand over this money to such a worthwhile

cause." The money was raised through Midlands Air Ambulance's Business Matters scheme which has partnered a number of local businesses to enhance corporate social responsibility within the Midlands.

Alison Blakeway, events and volunteer co-ordinator at Midlands Air Ambulance received the cheque.

She said: "This is a great way to kick off our 20th anniversary."

"Without the support from local businesses the charity wouldn't be able to continue saving lives across the region so we're hoping other business will follow in Co-Op Logistic's footsteps and support us in this very special year."

Musicians in tribute to tree-smash father

Geoff ready for his words of art

A CARTOONIST and author is due to chat about his life and work tonight (Thursday) when he hosts a talk in Stourbridge.

Artist Geoff Tristram, of Eggington Road, Wollaston, is sharing the stories behind his works at the event at Stourbridge town hall from 7.45pm.

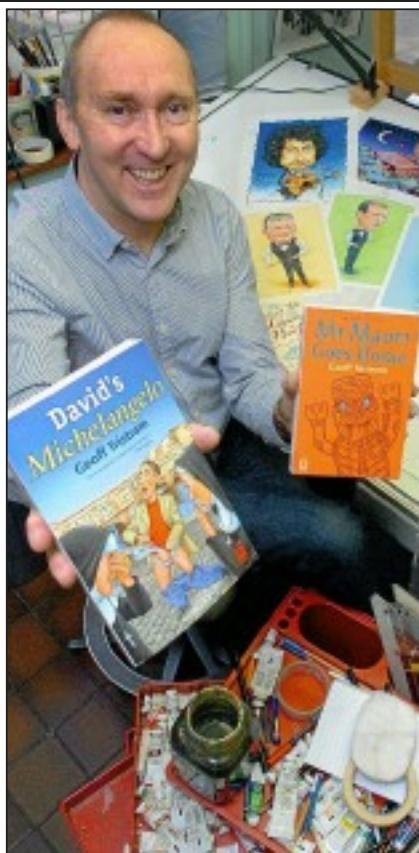
It is part of the Stourbridge Celebrity Lectures programme – a series of talks which takes place every year.

The 56-year-old, the brains behind the cover of UB40s debut album Signing Off in 1980, has plenty of anecdotes.

He will also be taking along some of his first artworks – including a portrait of his grandfather Geoff painted when he was 11. Geoff's work includes creating an ad board to publicise one of Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson's books.

He has also drawn and painted cartoon of musicians such as Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan and appeared on TV as part of the BBC's World Snooker Championships coverage. Geoff was invited to interview the top 16 players while sketching them at the same time to create a series of paintings.

Tickets for the show are priced £5 and are available from Books Unlimited in Lower High Street, Stourbridge.



Geoff Tristram surrounded by his artworks as he prepares for Thursday's talk in Stourbridge



Steve Cutler

BANDMATES and friends have paid tribute to a Kinver father-of-two killed when his car was crushed by a tree uprooted in high winds.

Steve Cutler was a founding member of rock band The Picture which also includes Fred Fieldhouse, John O'Neill and Kevin Marson.

Concert The Picture had been booked to play will now be dedicated to Mr Cutler's memory.

Mr Cutler, of Hillboro Rise, Kinver, was killed as he was driving home from rehearsals with the band at The Basement Studios in Turner Street, Dudley, last Thursday evening. The 51-year-old who worked for Frontline Tools, in Brettell Lane, Amblecote, Stourbridge, was travelling on the A458 Bridgnorth Road, Stourton, near Stourbridge, when the tree hit his Mercedes Vaneo people carrier, near the junction with Hyde Lane.

Floral tributes have been laid at the scene.

Memory

He leaves wife Alison and two sons, Alex and Jack, who are both in their 20s.

Mr Cutler was due to play with The Picture on opening night of The Baseline at The Earl of Dudley Arms pub, in Wellington Road, Dudley, on February 25. Organisers have vowed the show would still go ahead in Mr Cutler's memory.

Basement Studios manager Frank Williams said: "Everyone here is very upset, I was very sad when I heard what had happened."

"We still want to do the concert in his memory because I hope he would have wanted that."

Band member John O'Neill, writing a message on the band's Myspace webpage, said: "We will cherish the memories we shared together always."

"Our love and thoughts are with Alison and the boys, love always, Fred John and Kev."

Shows are saved in budget U-turn

SANDWELL Show and the Historic Vehicle Show, which attract more than 20,000 visitors a year, have been saved after a U-turn by council bosses.

Chiefs had drawn up plans to charge admission for the vehicle show in May so it could pay for itself.

They sent out tenders for caterers and entertainers and spent £150 advertising the new

charges in magazines but have now aborted the plans.

Changes were discussed after the budget for the Sandwell Show, held in the Sandwell Valley in August, was slashed.

The authority's budget for shows and events has been cut by more than £100,000, endangering the St George's Fun Day which will now be a small museum-run event in the grounds of the Manor House in

West Bromwich. Councillor Anne Shackleton, the borough's culture and leisure chief, said it was decided at cabinet not to levy a charge for the Sandwell Vehicle Show.

"There are no plans to charge for the Sandwell Show and it will go ahead as planned," she added.

Councillor Shackleton did not clarify how the authority would pay for the events, nor how smaller budgets would

affect entertainment at the Sandwell Show. In a letter dated January 25, officers revealed that the historic vehicle show, which has been running for the past 32 years, was no longer in the budget.

The letter said: "The shows and events budget has been reduced by over £100,000 in the financial year 2011-12."

Former vehicle show organiser Geoff Price said: "This is a massive U-turn."

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Owner's fears after shooting of pet cat



Alison Holden from Brockmoor with her cat Sparta which was shot in the leg

A CAT owner in Dudley says she is terrified to let her pet out the house after it was shot in the leg.

She is now calling on other residents to keep a close eye on their pets as she says police told her a second cat in the area was shot on the same day.

Alison Holden says that when her cat, called Sparta, arrived back at her home in Brockmoor, Brierley Hill, limping badly with blood on his fur, she thought he had been in a fight with another cat.

But when he was still limping a day later she decided to go to the vets where it was found he had been shot. The cat then had to undergo a £400 operation.

Suffering

Cheekout assistant Mrs Holden, aged 43, of Briers Close, said: "They said the operation was quite complicated and if it didn't work he would have to have his leg amputated. Obviously I said yes to trying the operation as he is a very much-loved cat."

"We got him back from the vets and despite looking very sorry for himself, having been shaved all down his side, with a row of stitches and the bullet hole now visible he is coming on OK."

Mrs Holden added: "I will now be terrified of letting him outside when he is better too, as the next time he could be killed. It's like this person has stolen £465 off me, and also my peace of mind for my cat, not to mention the suffering my cat has gone through."

Demands for answers over addresses mix-up

PARCELS, fridges and even a funeral firm turned up in the wrong place as part of a postal mix-up spanning 30 years. The confusion has seen unusual deliveries intended for Greenwood Avenue in Langley turn up in a road with the same name in Rowley Regis, and vice versa.

Jacqueline Adams, of Greenwood Avenue in Rowley Regis has endured the confusion for years and now wants some answers. She said she had even been sent a notice of outstanding poll tax and a fridge she had not ordered.

On one occasion, she said, traffic cones had been laid out on the street for a funeral when no-one there had passed away.

Miss Adams, aged 59, said: "If the funeral cones weren't for anyone here, someone must not have had them over in Langley. Over the summer I also had the electrician here and then two repair men from the council turned up and said they were here to do some plastering. I told them they had the wrong address. It's been going on for years."

"I've even had a hand-delivered letter for outstanding poll tax, which you cannot return to sender, so you've got to ask how does this keep happening?"

"I don't like the idea of someone else getting my post, a stranger maybe opening up my phone bill or something with all my details on it. We've asked the council if they have had complaints but they said it was down to the sorting office in Birmingham."

Wrong

Grandmother-of-two Christine Ainge, a cleaner and Miss Adams' neighbour, added: "A while ago some people turned up saying they were here to do a window repair for my house."

"I was trying to persuade them for ages I'd not ordered anything to do with the windows, but they were convinced because they had the postcode down, but it was wrong."

In a letter to Mrs Adams Sandwell Council said it had contacted the local sorting office which had reported no problems with the mail.

Half-term fun with Thomas

A POPULAR tourist attraction in Staffordshire is gearing up to reopen for half-term. Drayton Manor Theme Park's Thomas Land attraction, along with the on-site 15-acre zoo, will reopen to the public from Saturday, February 19.

Thomas Land is home to 12 rides and attractions based on lovable characters, including Cranky the Crane and Harold the Helicopter, featured in the hit children's television series Thomas and Friends.

Poppy Appeal a record-breaker

A BLACK Country branch of the Royal British Legion is celebrating after raising a record-breaking total during the Poppy Appeal.

More than £31,000 has been generated by the Kingswinford branch.

It beats last year's sum of £28,000 despite the economic downturn.

Appeal organisers say support has increased since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The amount raised includes a £500 donation from Covanta Energy of

Pensnett Trading Estate with a further £200 donated by their staff.

Kingswinford Poppy Appeal organiser, Alan Barratt said: "This is a tremendous achievement. My thanks go to supermarket, businesses, traders, and the Merry Hill Centre."

"We must not forget also our members and helpers who gave many hours of their time selling poppies, Kingswinford Air Cadets, the poppy walkers and anyone else who helped."

Museums offer some crafty fun



Museum assistant Amy Clarke promotes the Sticky Saturday event across Dudley

YOUNGSTERS have been getting to grips with some new crafts at sessions being held in Dudley.

Sticky Saturday, a family craft club, is held regularly at different museums around the borough every month.

There are three sessions a month, with each site - Broadfield House Glass Museum, Kingswinford, Red House Glass Cone, Wordsley, and Dudley Museum and Art Gallery - running an activity one Saturday each month.

Dudley Council spokeswoman Jessica Haines said no booking was needed at the activities. "Families can just drop in and take part in a craft, which has a different theme every month," she said.

"The sessions are free and families don't even have to tidy up after themselves."

Last Saturday's event was at Broadfield House Glass Museum in Kingswinford. Sessions run between 1.30pm and 3.30pm.

This Saturday (February 12) the fun will be at Dudley Museum and on February 19, the Red House Glass Cone.

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Anger after village is left without new bins

Drama group is on the lookout

A CHARITY drama group set up to increase the confidence of people with mental illness is looking for new members.

The Dudley Rethink Act Up Theatre Company, set up by mental health charity Rethink, is hoping to recruit people with mental illness or who care for someone with a mental illness.

The group has been running for 17 years but currently has just seven members. They write all their own scripts based on personal experiences.

Changes

Mental health recovery worker Sarah Winchurch said: "We really want some more members. The theatre group is part of a package of recovery for our clients, and it helps them with their confidence and socialisation."

Miss Winchurch said the current performance was entitled "Reasonable Adjustments", and focused on the changes firms have to make to help someone who is disabled or who had a mental illness. Rethink is based in King Street, Dudley - call Miss Winchurch on 01384 869898.



Volunteer Robert Jones with Rethink users and drama group members Samuel Sunderland, David Dickinson, and mental health worker Sarah Winchurch

A VILLAGE High Street has been without litter bins for two months following a £900,000 revamp sparking fury among residents and traders.

Kinver High Street businesses are putting out their own bins to stop rubbish being thrown down, making the village look untidy.

Traders say they are furious bins were not installed despite renovation of the High Street being finished in mid-November. South Staffordshire District Council said bins and cycle parks would arrive in the next fortnight.

The council say they had been made to order which had taken the extra time. They will be colour-coded with some for regular rubbish and other for recyclable litter.

Sarah Jolly, of The Butchery, High Street, said: "This is the latest in a catalogue of problems along the High Street.

"I have not heard one single person say a good thing about the renovation yet.

"The issue with the bins is just terrible. What is the point of these improvements to make the village look good if there is nowhere for people to put their litter?

Black

"We have taken to putting our own bin outside so people have a place where they can put their rubbish. It is just unfathomable why this has not already been done."

Resident Bob Clarke said: "The works took more than 10 months to finish. Why couldn't these bins have been made during this time so they would have been ready?"

"Even if that had not been possible, we are two months removed from these works being finished."

Council spokesman Jamie Angus said: "Council engineers to instal them."

Several traders had a big drop in profits, during the revamp work and some closed, including accessory store Bags 'n' Things, in January last year.

Villagers said that black asphalt at one end spoiled the look of the village.

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Stagehand hunt to aid fundraiser

United event for charity



Gemma Simmer, centre, with, from left, Tividale FC secretary Robert Poole, Carl Bottley, John Gwinnett, Martin Barnsley, all from Netherton Colts, and Teenage Cancer Trust fundraiser Craig Burchell, at Tividale Football Club

TWO Black Country football clubs and a manufacturing firm joined forces to raise £1,400 for a teenage cancer charity.

More than 120 people enjoyed a night of comedy and tales of football's bygone era to bring in cash for the Teenage Cancer Trust.

The night was organised by GM Steels, in Dudley Road West, Tividale, Oldbury.

The firm which has run successful charity nights over the years enlisted the help of Tividale FC and Netherton Colts under-15s for the latest event. Ex-Liverpool player Joey Jones was guest

speaker at the club's event in November, alongside comic Leslie Gibson. And the firm's boss John Gwinnett, aged 53, of Dudley, said the comedy night had been a huge success.

"We hadn't done an event for a while so thought it would be a good to revive one for such a worthy cause," he said.

The money raised was presented to the charity last Monday by Gemma Simmer, aged 21, from Dudley, who had been in remission for five years after suffering Hodgkin's Disease. Gemma is a relative of one of the footballers.

AN assistant stage manager is needed to help stage a Midland fundraising concert. The MUSICIA 11 event, in aid of Clent Sunfield School, has been lined up for July 30 by Belbroughton couple Roger and Gaye Hadley.

A host of artists including Italian pianist Antonio-Pompeo Baldi and his wife Emanuela Friscione will perform with Kingswinford's Gentlemen Singers Male Voice Choir.

Lighting and sound crew have already been signed up. But an assistant stage manager is still needed for the event at Church Farm in Bradford Lane, Belbroughton.

Talent

Mrs Hadley said: "We do hope someone who is either an experienced stage manager, or who is learning the role, would give a little of their time to help MUSICIA 11 be a success."

"We are sure there is someone with talent out there who could help us."

To help call Mrs Hadley on 07527 214946 or visit www.musicia11.com

Ahead of the event, a fundraising dinner is being held at The Talbot in Belbroughton on Monday, March 14. Tickets cost £25 each and are available by calling Mrs Hadley.

Training studio plan approved

A RETROSPECTIVE planning application for offices to become a personal training studio have been approved.

Dudley Council's development control committee agreed the site in Lawnswood Road, Wordsley, had not been changed greatly from its original use and had sufficient parking.

Let us pay as church helps out charities

HAGLEY churchgoers gave more than £10,000 to charities in the last year.

A total of £4,000 was donated through St Saviour's Church's outreach programme, including £1,200 to a programme to pay for eight children around the world to have surgery for cleft palates.

Donations also included £1,300 for the Farmers' Overseas Action Group and money to support families coping with Aids, domestic violence and poverty in Uganda; the Midlands Air Ambulance, and the Three Roses Home for people with Down's Syndrome in Clent. Just over £1,000 was raised to help the people of Haiti, and £462 was collected for victims of the Pakistan floods.

Other charities helped included Lord Cobham's Worcestershire Youth Cricket Trust, the British Legion, the Children's Society, Acorn's Children's Trust, the Bishop Simeon Trust and a project to finance a child's education in Malawi.

House now in different style

A FORMER house will become a hairdressers.

Dudley councillors agreed a change of use application for the house in Lawnswood Road, Wordsley. The property, opposite The Old Cat pub, is near to ample parking spaces.

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It's more theatre for Ben

SCHOOLBOY Ben Evans is reaching for the stars after landing the leading role in Lionel Bart's musical Oliver! at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre.

The nine-year-old pupil at The Royal Wolverhampton School beat off the challenge of 40 other young hopefuls who were on the shortlist for the part.

The production by West Bromwich Operatic Society is being staged from May 10-14.

Ben, from Stourbridge Road, Wombourne, has already been in six shows including The Forbidden Planet when it was at the Grand.



Brett Wood, aged 18

Teenage lead thief preyed on the old and vulnerable in night spree

A TEENAGE thief who stripped more than £1,500 worth of lead from elderly people's homes during an overnight stealing spree has been given a suspended prison sentence.

The 18-year-old "preyed on vulnerable victims" and left them facing bills of hundreds of pounds to replace the lead and fix the damage, a court heard.

Nine homes were targeted by Brett Wood. He got away with lead from seven of them.

Wood, of Sedgeford Close, Brierley Hill, had been helped by a 17-year-old accomplice and a driven Dudley Magistrates Court heard.

Magistrates chairman Mrs Barbara Sykes, told him: "This was a calculated

series of thefts and there was a considerable number of victims."

Properties in Heath Farm Road, Belbroughton Road and Fredericks Close, Norton, Stourbridge, were targeted.

Police were called by residents who had heard noises on their roofs or had seen Wood ripping lead flashing from their homes at about 3am on January 4.

One piece of lead in the haul was 8ft long, said Miss Maxine Macintosh, prosecuting.

Stealing

Wood was also seen at about 8.30am loading the metal into a Vauxhall Nova in South Road, Stourbridge.

Miss Macintosh added: "He has preyed on elderly and vulnerable victims."

But Miss Diljit Bachada, defending,

said Wood did not know he was stealing from elderly people. She added: "This was an opportunistic crime." The 17-year-old, who cannot be named for legal reasons, will be sentenced on February 16 having pleaded guilty to the same charges.

Wood pleaded guilty to seven counts of theft and two of attempted theft. He also admitted cannabis possession.

He was handed a 12-week sentence suspended for 12 months, a 12-month community order and told to complete 120 hours unpaid work in the community.

He must pay £641 compensation – a third of £1,923, the total value of damage caused and lead stolen.

Wood will also undergo 23 sessions on a Thinking Skills programme, including modules on "problem solving", "self-control" and "positive relationships".

Talk on brave spy who was UK Schindler

PEOPLE can learn more about Stourbridge spy Frank Foley, who was known as the British Schindler, at a talk tonight (Thursday).

Major Foley, a passport officer in Berlin, helped to save the lives of thousands of Jews during the Second World War.

Wordsley History Society will host the talk by the Rev Gary Ward at the Community Centre, Wordsley Green, at 7.30pm.

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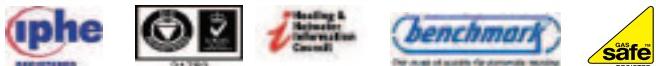
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Group's £500 for hospice

A TIPTON volunteer group raised more than £500 for a Black Country hospice. Tibbington Lights Theme raised £525 over a series of collections during December and gave all the proceeds to the Compton Hospice near Wolverhampton. Members of the group, which has been running for the past five years, collected on the street, at the Asda supermarket in Great Bridge and Wednesbury's Morrisons store.

Half-term fun at centre

FOOTBALL, basketball, craft workshops and a roller disco have been lined up as part of a packed programme of half-term activities for youngsters in Stourbridge. The sessions, at Crystal Leisure Centre kick off on February 21 with a roller disco at 1.30pm. Gymnastics will be held on February 23 and arts and crafts sessions on February 24. A 50 per cent discount will be given to under-16s who join sports classes.

Hidden cabling hitch for recycling depot

Urgent appeal by charity shop

A CHARITY shop in Dudley has launched an urgent appeal for new donations after the store's manager said it was the quietest spell she had seen in the 18 years she had been there.

The Cancer Research shop in Castle Street is on the look-out for an array of good quality items but is most in need of women's clothing, shoes and handbags.

Manager Susan Guest said: "I have been here 18 years and have never seen it so bad. I don't know whether it is the recession and that people are hanging on to things."

She added: "We would urge people to have a look in their wardrobes and if there is anything at all they have which is of a good quality and that they don't want we would be happy to receive it so we can sell it for a good cause."

Donations can be made at the shop between 9am and 5pm.



Cancer Research shop manager Susan Guest is urgently appealing for donations

WORK has started on a £1 million recycling depot being built on the site of a former BT building.

Dudley Council is building it on vacant land between Blowers Green Road and the Dudley Southern Bypass.

It will deal with cans, plastics, bottles, paper and cardboard. Work started after planning permission was secured last year. However, the project had to be amended, with a second planning application submitted last week.

Council spokesman Chris Howes said: "We already have planning permission for a mobile office, which now needs to be amended to accommodate an unforeseen underground cable."

The depot will relieve congestion at the current Lister Road base as well as allowing the council to collect extra material in future.

Work, due to end in spring, comes part-way through a trial of plastic and cardboard recycling in parts of the borough which may be rolled out if it is a success.

About 11,000 homes are taking part in a scheme launched last September and running until April.

Football club in search to sign up physiotherapist

DUDLEY Town FC is looking for a team physio. People can either have previous training in physiotherapy or receive on-the-job training. Basic first aid qualifications are a must.

The non-league side plays its games at The Dell Stadium, in Bryce Road, Brierley Hill. Call club chairman Stephen Austin on 07412 046050 or first team manager Neil Perks on 07912 148279 for details

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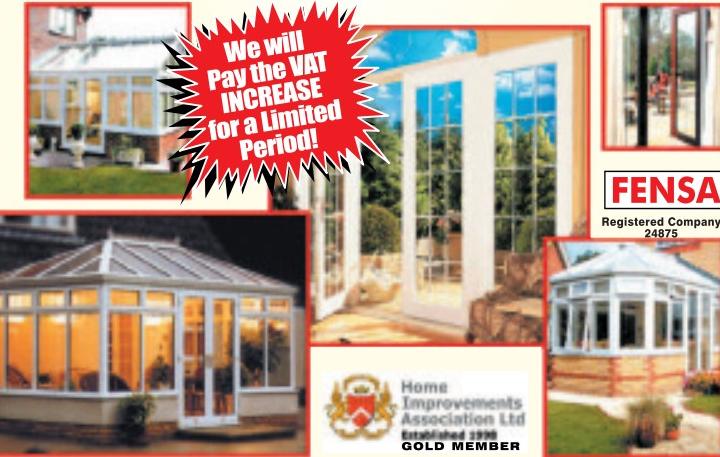
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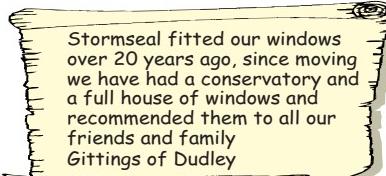
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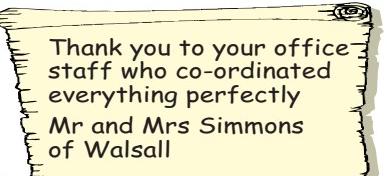
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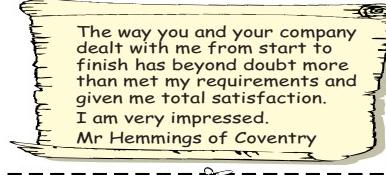
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Miss Challoner of Wolverhampton



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Chicken Tikka	£2.85
Chunks of chicken breast marinated in homemade yoghurt & cooked in a tandoori.	
Lamb Tikka	£2.95
Chunks of lamb marinated in homemade yoghurt & cooked in a tandoori.	
Tandoori Chicken	£2.95
Marinated in special spices and yoghurt & cooked in a tandoori.	
Sheekh Kebab	£2.45
Lamb Mince combined with special spices & cooked in a tandoori.	
Fish Pakora	£2.85
Tender pieces of fish marinated in ginger, garlic & mint with a hint of spices then dipped in spiced gram flour & deep fried.	
Onion Bhagee (v)	£2.00
Deep Fried golden balls of sliced onions, potatoes & spinach.	
Somasa (veg) (v)	£2.00
Mixed Vegetables & potatoes together with roasted cumin seeds, wrapped in a triangular pastry & deep fried.	
Cheesy Wedges (v)	£2.25
Spicy potatoe wedges topped with melted cheddar cheese.	
Onion Rings (v)	£1.95
Onions coated in a batter and deep fried.	

SHARERS.

All served with salad and mint sauce.	
Mixed grill	£9.95
Chicken Tikka, Sheekh Kebab, Lamb Tikka & Tandoori Chicken.	

MAINS.

Chicken Nuggets	£4.45
Chicken nuggets served with chips and salad.	
Beer Battered Fish	£4.95
Beer battered white fish, served with chips, peas & tartare sauce.	
Scampi	£4.95
Deep Fried whelktail breaded scampi, served with chips peas & tartare sauce.	

GRILLS.

All our grills are served with salad & chips.	
Half Tandoori Chicken	£5.75
Half a chicken marinated in special spices & yoghurt & cooked in a Tandoori.	
Chicken Tikka	£5.75

Tandoori Sheekh Kebab £5.45
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Valentine's Menu

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£14.95

Starter & Main
or Main & Dessert

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Friday 12 Noon - 12.30 am

Saturday 12 Noon - 12.00 am

Sunday 12 noon - 11.00 pm

Food Served

Monday - Thursday 5 pm - 9.30 pm

Friday - Saturday 12 Noon - 11.00 pm

Sunday 12 Noon - 10.00 pm

OTHER BALTIS.

Keema	£5.95
Lamb mince and peas.	
Tandoori Chicken Makhni	£5.45

Pieces of Chicken, roasted in a clay oven, cooked in special sauce, ground almond, yoghurt, butter & cream.

SIDE DISHES.

Chips	£1.25
Salad	£1.25
Plain Rice	£1.45
Naan	£1.40
Garlic Naan	£1.55
Keema Naan	£1.85
Tandoori Roti	£1.40
Raita	£1.25

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CHILDRENS MENU - ALL £4.99

All come with free dessert & Drink

Spaghetti Bolognais
Spaghetti Pasta in a rich meat sauce slowly cooked with hidden vegetables and herbs.

Macaroni Cheese

Elbow shape macaroni in a creamy mild cheese sauce.

Chicken Nuggets

Served with Chips.

Chicken Tikka

Chunks of chicken breast marinated in homemade yoghurt & cooked in a tandoori, served with chips.

Chicken Tikka Masala

Chicken marinated in Tandoori spices then cooked in masala sauce & topped with cream & served with rice.

DESSERTS.

Belgian Sweet Waffles	£3.29
Served with vanilla ice cream & chocolate sauce.	

Strawberry Cheesecake	£3.89
Crunchy biscuit base topped with a layer of cheesecake & topped with delicious strawberries.	

Apple Crumble	£3.29
Served with custard or ice cream.	

Chocolate Fudge Cake	£3.79
A slice of scrumptious layered chocolate cake served with vanilla ice cream.	

Banoffie Pie	£3.69
Sticky toffee sauce packed with slices of banana on crumbly biscuit base topped with cream & cocoa dusting.	

Strawberry Trifle	£2.29
Ice Cream Sunday	£2.99

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Four Bedroom Mid Terrace Property and Downstairs Bedroom and Wetroom,porch, Lounge, Kitchen/Diner, First Floor Bathroom, Central Heating+Double Glazing, Driveway for Parking, Rear Garden.

Edward Road, Halesowen



£105,000 **NEW**

Three Bedroom Terraced Property briefly comprising Lounge, Kitchen, Conservatory, Bathroom, Double Glazing and Central Heating (where specified) Rear Garden.

Wesley Avenue, Halesowen



£125,000

A three bedroom mid terraced property with comprising of hallway, lounge, kitchen, first floor bathroom, driveway providing off road parking, double glazing and central heating.

King Street, Halesowen



£110,000

This end terrace house has entrance lobby, downstairs wc, lounge, kitchen, utility room, three bedrooms, bathroom and rear garden. double glazing

Chaddesley Road, Halesowen



£160,000 **REDUCED**

Semi detached house has dining area, lounge, kitchen, three bedrooms, bathroom, garage, driveway, rear garden. Also benefiting central heating and double glazing.

Springfield Lane, Rowley Regis



£90,000 **REDUCED**

A Three Bedroom Three Storey Mid Terrace property which in brief comprises of hallway, wc, kitchen, lounge and bathroom. Front garden and carport.

Brett Young Close, Halesowen



£170,000

Three Bedroom Terraced property, Kitchen, Lounge, En Suite to main Bedroom, Two Further Bedrooms And Bathroom, Double Glazing and Central Heating, Rear Garden.

Dark Lane, Romsley



£400,000 **NEW**

Four Bedroom House , Kitchen, WC, Lounge, Utility, Bathroom Kitchen, Lounge, Bathroom and Bedroom, Driveway providing parking, rear garden, central heating and double glazing

Beeches View Avenue, Halesowen



£189,950

A Four Bedroom Link-Detached Property with En-Suite, Guest wc, Lounge, Dining room, Kitchen, Family Bathroom, Rear garden, Driveway, Garage, Double Glazing.

Olive Hill Road, Halesowen



£215,000

Detached house, two reception rooms, kitchen, sun room, garage, three bedrooms, bathroom, rear garden. off road parking, central heating and double glazing

Apperley Way, Halesowen



£115,000

Three Bedroom semi detached property, porch, entrance hallway, lounge/diner, kitchen, second reception room, bathroom, double glazing, Driveway providing off road parking and rear garden.

Beecher Street, Halesowen



£180,000

Traditional Three Bedroom Detached Property, Entrance Hall, Lounge, Dining Room, Cellar Kitchen, Bathroom + WC, Driveway to Front and Tandem Garage, Landscaped Garden to Rear.

Barrs Road, Cradley Heath



£192,000

Four Bedroom Semi Detached Traditional Property, Dining Room, Lounge, Kitchen, Utility, Wc, First Floor Bathroom, Central Heating, Rear Garden, Off Road Parking.

Wycheley Way, Cradley Heath



£90,000

A Modern first floor flat Briefly Comprising of a Lounge, Kitchen, Two bedrooms, Bathroom and Also Having Allocated parking.

Copperbirch, Halesowen



£205,000

A three bedroom detached property briefly comprising through lounge, conservatory, kitchen, wc and shower room. Rear garden and garage.

Bloomfield Street North, Halesowen



£155,000

A two bedroomeed semi detached bungalow, Lounge/diner, Kitchen, two bedrooms and family bathroom, block paved driveway, integral garage and a garden to the rear.

Bearmore Road, Cradley Heath



£125,000

A well presented three bedroomed semi detached property offered for sale with NO UPWARD CHAIN comprising of lounge, dining room, conservatory and fitted kitchen.

Bromsgrove Road, Hunnington



£850,000

Detached four bedroom house, private drive, triple garages, indoor 49ft swimming pool, sauna and changing room, lounge,dining room, study, kitchen/diner, rear garden, paddock and further land.

Banners Street, Halesowen



£85,000

Three bedroom semi detached property, two reception rooms, kitchen, downstairs shower room and wc, first floor bathroom, rear garden, driveway, double glazing and central heating.

Olive Drive, Halesowen



£95,000

Three Bedroom Semi Detached Property, Lounge, Kitchen, WC, Utility Area, Bathroom, Front and Rear Gardens (viewing essential to appreciate garden), Double Glazing.

Beeches View Avenue, Halesowen



£90,000

This traditional semi detached house has entrance hallway, lounge, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms, bathroom and front and rear gardens.

Hawne Close, Halesowen



£100,000

A three bedroom semi detached property briefly comprising of a reception room, kitchen, three bedrooms, bathroom and garden.

Hollydale Road, Rowley Regis



£120,000

Two Bedroom End Terrace, Front Gravelled area, Kitchen, Lounge, Conservatory, Utility, Bathroom and rear Garden, 5% VENDOR GIFT available,

Oak Barn Road, Halesowen



£150,000

This semi detached house has lounge/diner, kitchen, conservatory, three bedrooms, bathroom, rear garden and double glazing NO UPWARD CHAIN



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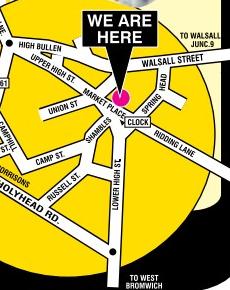
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"We must have changed our minds a dozen times, they happily made the changes - and without any extra costs" Jeni & Tony Kingston, Tettenhall

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What this series offers is something reminiscent of the heyday of the BBC programming crossed with the nostalgic magic of the old British Rail information films.

Portillo never looks comfortable doing his pieces to camera or vox pops in the many locations he stops off at, bizarrely, that all adds to the charm of his journey through time and social history as he walks along carefully like a parson reading his daily prayer book.

GRJRJ1 is an extremely well put together series with the archive footage and pictures used to good effect and not just as padding.

The episodes are further bolstered by stunning aerial shots of

the countryside and landmarks Portillo visits and travels through, giving the viewer a chance to see familiar and not so familiar buildings, structures and landscapes in a way they would probably never get to view.

This is not just a series for railway enthusiasts it will appeal to anyone interested in how our lands and lifestyles were shaped and changed by the railways.

It shows how industries from coal to kippers were spread nationwide and chronicles the sometimes high price in human life paid to build some of our most impressive structures.

Childhood

It will appeal also to those who enjoy wonderful scenery or those who are just nostalgic for an age they can just about remember from their childhood.

Portillo uses the train journeys like a time machine going back to the age of Bradshaw, retelling the author's enthusiasm for the railway, the technology of the time and the buildings and structures the Victorians created.

During the journeys which take him from Scotland to London and across the Midlands and down as far as you can go in Penzance, Portillo not only gets to indulge his passion for railways, and steam trains in particular, but he also gets to share some of the hidden legacies the great age of steam trains opened up for the first time to the ordinary man.

It also shows the grandeur of the buildings and enormity of some of the structures which the Victorians built or had a vision for.

Among other nuggets of information you find out are the treacherous Morecambe Bay sands which are watched over by the Queen's guide Cedric Robinson, a position which goes back to the early 1500s, and uncover evidence of cannibalism in Cornwall and discover how one of the biggest domes in the world,

which is in the Midlands, was linked to the Tay Bridge disaster.

Portillo's slightly awkward presence adds to the quirkiness of this series and there is something extremely watchable in him attempting a Scouse accent while journeying through Liverpool's Lime Street or being ignored by a befriended guard as he tries desperately to wave goodbye to her, or spilling his beer as he tries to read a plaque

at the same time as drinking in the lobby of a hotel.

Whether you like trains, fantastic scenery, nostalgia, social history or just want to know more about the country you live in Great British Railway Journeys is a wonderfully watchable series to do all this and more.

The 4 disc set Great Railway Journeys of Britain Series 1 is out now on Freemantle DVD.

Danny Farragher

thechronicle

Stars to grace stage at town concert hall

New shop proves popular

SHOPPERS in Halesowen have a new chance for bargain hunting after a new Salvation Army charity shop opened its doors.

The branch is in Hagley Street and bosses say it has already proved a hit with members of the public.

Manager Christopher Scott said: "We've been very busy getting the shop ready for a while now and the response from local residents has been fantastic."

Team

"People have been regularly popping by, keen to see what's going on and how they can help. We've also had some very generous donations from locals including some lovely gift sets that were unwanted Christmas presents so we're absolutely thrilled."

"We hope that now we're open the local community will enjoy shopping here."

The shop is appealing for more people to join its team of volunteers. Anyone interested can pop in or email volunteer@satradingco.org



Sales assistant Ishamar Guy and store manager Christopher Scott at the shop



Jason Manford Jimmy Carr Ken Dodd

caught up in controversy last year following allegations about his private life.

The comedy will continue when Jimmy Carr, with his Laughter Therapy tour, hits the concert hall on June 22.

As well as acts from the national comic circuit, home-grown Black Country comics will also be taking a wry look at life in the region.

The Black Country Comedy Show tour presents May Contain Nuts on March 4. It features the talents of the Fizzog Theatre Company and Barbara Nice for the sketch and music show at Stourbridge Town Hall, within the Crown Centre.

Soul

Nostalgia enthusiasts can enjoy a revival of the '20s and '30s with The Charleston Chasers performing vintage pop music during a matinee show on February 15.

And music fans are catered for with a visit by US soul singer Ben E King. He will be joined by Gary US Bonds at Dudley Concert Hall – performing in The Great American Soulbook – on February 26.

The Gentlemen Songsters, will raise the roof of the concert hall on March 26. See www.dudley.gov.uk or call 0300 555 2345 for more ticket details.

REVIEWS

thechronicle

How the railways became the arteries of the nation

GREAT BRITISH RAILWAY JOURNEYS - SERIES 1

It's said the simplest ideas are the best and in the case of Great British Railway Journeys 1 it's true.

Take a 19th century railway "bible" written by George Bradshaw, the father of rail timetables, and 150 years on see how much of what he noted and the journeys he catalogued remain.

Then have it presented by former MP and Minister for Transport Michael Portillo who, although a rail enthusiast, would not be everyone's first choice as a frontman.

Clinging to his "Bradshaw's" like Linus to his security blanket, Portillo follows the journeys north from Scotland to as far south as Penzance and east to west across the UK through Walsall, Shropshire and into Wales, along the routes set out in the guide and stopping at the places lauded by Bradshaw.

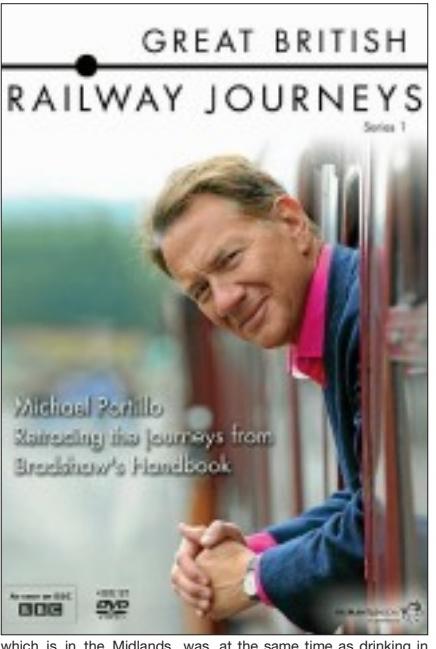
Nostalgic

What this series offers is something reminiscent of the heyday of the BBC programming crossed with the nostalgic magic of the old British Rail information films.

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GRJRJ1 is an extremely well put together series with the archive footage and pictures used to good effect and not just as padding.

The episodes are further bolstered by stunning aerial shots of



Michael Portillo
Revisiting the journeys from
Bradshaw's Handbook

Available on DVD and
Blu-ray

Homes needed as 35 racing hounds retired

DOZENS of retired greyhounds being cared for by a South Staffordshire charity are on the lookout for new loving homes.

The Retired Greyhound Trust is bracing itself for a tough year after revealing its national rehoming figures for 2010 were more than 500 down on 2009.

Bosses said there were currently 35 greyhounds in the Monmore Green Retired Greyhound Trust kennels, in Essington,

between Cannock and Wolverhampton, which need homes.

Ivor Stocker of the trust, said: "Greyhounds have very individual personalities and our volunteers, have years of experience homing them. They can match the right dog to the right individual or family to ensure everyone lives happily."

Visit www.retiredgreyhounds.co.uk for information.

Takeaway's £12,000 bill over maggoty chicken

Winners tasting success at exams



From front, Ceri Ward, of Tipton, with, from left, Pauline Aston, of Tipton, Lynne Wright, of Oldbury, and Gwendoline Jukes, of Tipton, and colleagues

CATERING staff at a Tipton school are the cream of the crop after passing qualifications for cooking fresh food.

The 15-strong team at the RSA Academy, in Bilston Road, have all passed GNVQs for cooking food from scratch, good hygiene and food safety.

Director

The team of women, recruited locally, have graduated from reheating prepared food to cooking meals with vegetables grown by pupils at the school, baking fresh bread and ensuring children have a balanced diet.

Lesley James, director of business development at the academy, said: "We've been training these ladies to work in our catering kitchen and we're so proud of them."

The £30 million building opened in September.

BOOKS

thechronicle

Be thankful if you live in calm times

THE RECENT floods in Australia, Brazil and Sri Lanka have served to remind us that we are reliant on the whims of Mother Nature.

Even a natural problem of a far lesser degree of severity, an old fashioned cold snap, left the UK reeling.

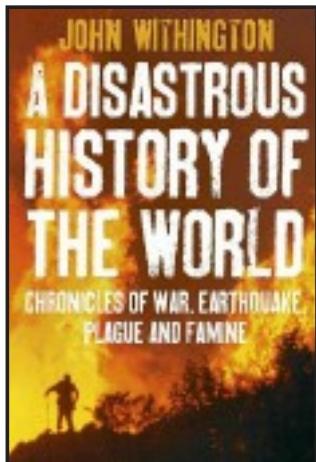
But none of this should surprise us, mankind has lived with disaster since the very beginning. Indeed, the human race had barely got going before it was almost wiped out by volcanic eruptions 74,000 years ago.

John Withington's fascinating *A Disastrous History of the World* (Platkus, paperback, £9.99) is an epic journey through the annals of calamity from the dawn of man right up to the Myanmar cyclone of 2008.

Avoidable

The first part of the book chronicles natural disasters - flood, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, storms, disease and famine. Then it looks at the worst, avoidable, disasters created by and inflicted on each other by man - invasions, massacres, riots, stampedes, crashes, explosions and terrorism. You will find them all here -

Leon Burakowski



Voices of the victims of the Blood Lands are heard

Blood Lands (Bodley Head, hardback, £25) is a gruelling read, not because of its 421 pages but its grim subject matter. However, it is also an astonishing work of research by Oxford and Harvard historian Timothy Snyder which brings the humanity back to those millions of victims of Hitler and Stalin's murderous regimes.

The statistics are shocking, 14 million killed during 12 years in the zone of death between Berlin and Moscow, in the Blood Lands of Poland, Belarus, the Baltic States, western Russia and the Ukraine. But statistics don't make you cry, hearing the plight of those who suffered, died and, in too few cases, survived the barely imaginable horrors reminds you that every one of those

statistics was a living, breathing, feeling human being like you.

Many thinking of this period conjure an image of the concentration camp and the Holocaust, the Nazis' 'Final Solution' and the industrialisation of murder. The reality for most of the victims, whether they be Jew, Pole, Russian peasant or anyone else considered inconvenient, was even more brutal and primitive than that.

Murders

Of the 14 million civilians and prisoners of war who died in the 'Blood Lands', more than half were deliberately starved to death. Most of the rest were shot.

The mass murders began in the Soviet Union before the Second World War with Stalin responsible for the starvation and execution of hundreds of thousands of his own

citizens. Hitler soon became an equally murderous monster with his mass killings of Jewish communities.

Where possible, Snyder names the guilty and some of the victims, regaining dignity for those treated with no respect by Nazi or Soviet killers. He has testimony from survivors and even victims, including personal journals found on the bodies of Polish officers shot and buried by the Soviet secret police at Katyn. The historian has also seen notes thrown by people being bussed to their deaths and words scratched onto the wall of a synagogue.

Snyder wants us to remember that behind each and every statistic was a human life. "Each one of them died a different death, since each of them had lived a different life," he says.

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Queens of catwalk are back for spring show

A FASHION show is set to coin the cash for a Stourbridge charity, with organisers hoping to raise more than £2,000.

Mary Stevens Hospice is organising the show at the Granary Restaurant, Stone, near Kidderminster, on March 31.

A similar event last September sold out in just 10 days, raising nearly £2,000, and many people were left disappointed that they could not attend.

Staff at the hospice in Hagley Road have increased numbers of seats to 160 for the second show next month and tickets are now on sale.

The event will start with a three-course lunch and designer fashions will be showcased by professional models.

Clothes have been provided for the event by Davenports No 2, of Harborne, Birmingham, and Sackcloth Designs, of Stourbridge.

The show will focus on spring fashions and feature casual daywear, knitwear, cocktail dresses and wedding outfits.

Tickets are priced £25 and can be purchased by calling 01384 377778.



Dressed looking the part are Janet Jones, head of fundraising at Stourbridge's Mary Stevens Hospice, Julie Marsden, owner of Davenports No 2, and Denise Olive

Shame of drinker who threw table at woman

A PUBGOER in Dudley threw a metal table at a woman who told him off for urinating in the garden, a court heard.

Thomas Miles, aged 23, of Thornfield Croft, Sedgley, was ordered to do 180 hours' community service by Wolverhampton Crown Court.

Miles had been drinking at the Spills Meadow pub, in Kent Street, Dudley, and became involved in "a bit of pushing and shoving" with the woman after she caught

him using the pub garden as a toilet, said Mr Howard Searle, prosecuting.

He hurled a metal table at her, and went to throw a wooden table at her as well before being stopped by onlookers.

Clouded

Judge Martin Walsh told him: "This was drunken boorish behaviour. It was disgraceful conduct in a public place."

Miles pleaded guilty to using threatening words and behaviour and was given a

three-month curfew order along with the unpaid community work, meaning he must stay in his house between 7pm and 5am.

Mr Searle said that after his arrest Miles told police officers he had downed six pints and that had clouded his judgment. He stressed he was full of remorse for his actions.

Miss Ruth Pathan, defending, said Miles accepted he should not have urinated in the pub garden – something he did because he was "extremely drunk."

Covering all the ages of romance

REVIEWS

ME TO YOU WITH LOVE - VIRGIN

If you fancy buying a romantic CD for the one you love this Valentine's Day then you could do worse than the lastest in the series Me To You With Love.

The two CD set which has 43 tracks pretty much covers all the bases no matter what age you are or which era you consider the most romantic.

If you grew up through the 50s you were just the right age to enjoy classics such as the velvet voiced Nat King Cole with L-O-V-E and the unmistakable sound of Louis Armstrong with We Have All The Time In The World to remind you of your youth although many of Satchmo's anthems have enjoyed new life thanks toadvertising.

Also from the 60s are The Shirelles and Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow or The Beach Boys' God Only Knows.

Every decade is



Wonderful World – Katie Melua



Smile – Lily Allen

covered with Huey Lewis and The Power of Love, Elton John's haunting anthem Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word, Hot Chocolate's obvious flat-tongued You Sexy Thing and the incredible voice of Minnie Riperton on Loving You.

If wearing a rah rah skirt was your way of being romantic then you will enjoy Can't Help Falling In Love by UB40 or if you sported your best pork pie hat to impress the ladies then Madness and It Must Be Love is the one for you.

The double CD brings you through the 90s and into the new Millennium with the Spice Girls and Stop, Roxette, It Must Have Been Love and of

course Robbie Williams and Angels.

For those who are still in the first flush of romance there are tracks from Eliza Doolittle, Katy Perry, Lily Allen with Smile, Norah Jones and Corinne Bailey Rae.

There are some nice additions on this album as well, which include Katie Melua duetting with the late great Eva Cassidy on What A Wonderful World, The Kooks with She Moves In Her Own Way, Tom Baxter and Better, and Joe Cocker's You Are So Beautiful.

Other tracks you can smooch to come from Nina Simone, Tina Turner, Bryan Ferry, Frankie Valli, Spandau Ballet, Don McLean and Shirley Bassey.

MTWL also includes the classic spinnemelter Let's Stay Together from Al Green, so open the wine and chocolates, dim the lights, close the curtains, snuggle up and enjoy these and many more romantic sounds.

From Me To You double CD is out now on Virgin. Danny Farragher

Adding an extra sparkle

IF you are looking for a classy wine to add extra sparkle to Valentine's Day, check out Canard-Duchene Champagnes, available from Majestic and from some other wine merchants.

The house of Canard-Duchene was founded in 1868 in the village of Ludes near Reims, at the heart of France's Champagne region.

The house were suppliers to the Russian imperial family, hence the double-headed eagle crest on the label.

The sabre on the label is a reminder of those romantic times when Hussars were adept at opening a Champagne bottle with a slash of their sabre.

Chardonnay

The Cuvee Leonie is made in the style of the founders, matured for a long period in the house's six kilometres of cellars. It has delicate fruit but also depth and power. It is made from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay grapes.

Champagne Canard-Duchene, the excellent main house sparkler, is a little cheaper but has plenty of quality, being a clean accessible brut.

Majestic have the Canard Duchene Grande Cuvee Charles VII NV Champagne, created to mark the house's centenary, at £25.

Leon Burakowski



All The Time in the World – Louis Armstrong.

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the pulse

Read all about it!
Who's in town?

BRITAIN'S favourite girl group The Saturdays provide a Valentine's Day treat for pop fans at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Monday.

Since they debuted in 2007 the girls have sold nearly 2 million records and racked up a very impressive seven top ten singles. They have fronted a major

campaign as the face of Impulse and starred in The Saturdays: 24/7, a prime-time behind-the-scenes documentary for ITV2.

The Saturdays' new album Headlines, released through Fascination Records, went straight into the UK albums chart at number 3 upon release, following the smash hit single Missing You.

Headlines! is an eight-track album that

includes a handful of sparkling new songs plus Ego and their number two smash from last year, Forever Is Over.

The new album is the result of studio sessions that took place during Ego's four-month chart reign last year.

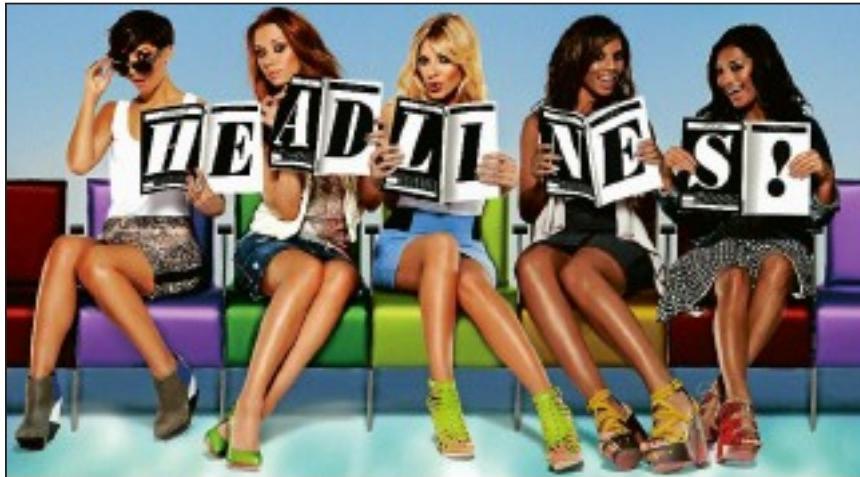
Una Healy, Frankie Sandford, Rochelle Wiseman, Mollie King and Vanessa White are experts on the live circuit having performed to thousands on their sold out 2009

tour and have since dazzled fans at festivals across the country.

Rochelle said: "We couldn't be more excited for the Headlines tour. Performing is absolutely our favourite part of being in The Saturdays, and we can't wait to see all our fans up and down the country!"

The Saturdays will be supported at the concert by boy band Twenty Twenty.

Tickets are priced £24.50.



The reinvented McFly promote their Birmingham gig which will be at the LG Arena in March

McFly reveal their maturity

MCFLY have reinvented themselves as a stadium-filling mega-draw after the success of their fourth album Radio:Active in 2008 and fifth studio album Above The Noise late last year.

The latter provided them with the top five hit Shine A Light featuring Taio Cruz.

The band have matured from the power pop kids of the 5 Colours In Her Hair era, having

their own record label and finding success in America and Australia.

"We learnt to completely rethink what McFly could be," said singer Tom Fletcher.

They will be filling the arenas again next month including a gig at the LG Arena, Birmingham, on March 30.

Tickets cost £14 or £28.50. Contact 0844 3388000 or visit www.theticketfactory.com



Television starts – page 24

YOUR EIGHT-PAGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE AND WEEK'S TV VIEWING



Theatre and gig round-up – page 23



Reviews – page 28

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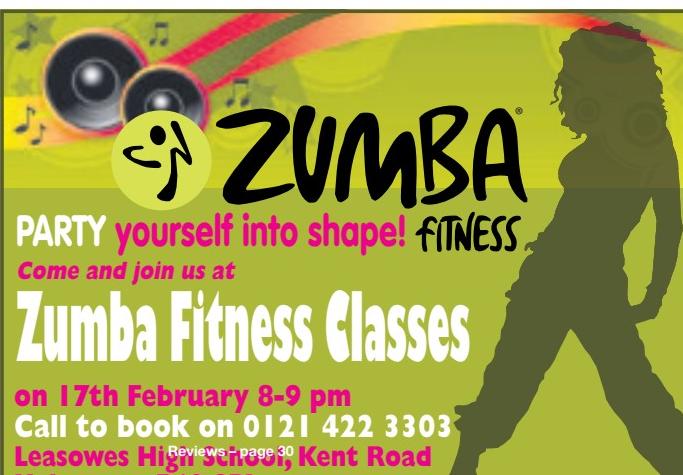
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Golden year charity sets target to beat heart disease



The charity aims to promote awareness of heart disease

A well known charity is celebrating its 50th birthday with half a century of love songs aimed straight at the heart.

Best of my love: Songs From The Heart, is a five-disc compilation album to take listeners on a trip down a musical memory lane.

It's a perfect Valentine's gift and will help raise vital funds for the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

The charity's vision is a world where people don't die prematurely from heart disease.

The BHF aims to achieve this through pioneering research, vital prevention activity and ensuring quality care and support for everyone living with heart disease.

The charity was founded in 1961 by a group of medical professionals wanting to fund extra research into the causes, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of heart and circulatory disease.

In making such an ambitious vision a reality it helps to set some milestones along the way and this is why the BHF have established a number of objectives to guide its day-to-day work.

Healthcare professionals

However, this can't be achieved alone. The charity is working alongside the Government, health charities, healthcare professionals and thousands of dedicated supporters to beat heart disease. Everybody has a part to play.

Its mission is to play a leading role in the fight against disease of the heart and circulation, so that it is no longer a major cause of disability and premature death.

In the strategy report, Beating Heart Disease Together, published in 2007, the BHF stated that, within a generation, it aims to:

- Reduce cardiovascular disease in the UK to one of the lowest levels in Europe.
- Within a decade, the BHF aims to:
 - Halve the number of people under 75 who die from cardiovascular disease
 - Make sure at least two thirds of people under 75 survive a heart attack
 - Reduce heart-related deaths in all UK local authority areas to the current level in south east England or below
 - Reverse the rise in childhood obesity.
- To help the charity get there, it's set a number of objectives across the following areas:
 - Research
 - Information
 - Campaigning
 - Care
 - Equality

To make all this work possible, the BHF relies on the public's generous donation of time and money.

Visit www.bhf.org.uk or call 020 7554 0000 for more information.

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The front cover of the BHF love songs compilation CD

the pulse

Niki stars in Blood Brothers

Matt to put gloss on Footloose

BUSTED star Matt Willis is gearing up for his role in the musical Footloose at Birmingham Hippodrome.

The I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here! winner in 2006 is playing the role of Chuck in the dance musical which can be seen at Birmingham Hippodrome from March 14 to 19.

Directed and choreographed by Olivier award-winner Karen Bruce, the fast-paced show is packed with lots of dance as well as some classic 80s anthems, including the hit title



Matt Willis

track Footloose! It tells the story of a city boy, Ren, who moves to a rural backwater in America where dancing is banned.

Tickets are priced £13 to £33 and available at www.birminghamhippodrome.com or on 0844 338 5000.

RADIO and TV regular Mark Steel, who has been a stand-up comedian for nearly 30 years, brings his comic musings to Wolverhampton's Slade Rooms on Thursday, February 17. The sharp-witted Steel is still at the top of his game, as anyone who tunes into Radio 4's The News Quiz will know. Tickets cost £15.

Dance sensations Flawless, from Britain's Got Talent, perform their variety of dazzling dance styles on Sunday night.

Steve Delaney brings his BBC Radio 4 comedy character, the language mangling former variety star

WILLY Russell's moving musical Blood Brothers, about twins separated at birth who are reunited with tragic results, returns to Wolverhampton next week with former X Factor finalist Niki Evans in the key role of Mrs Johnstone.

Russell's hard-hitting, dramatic, but often very funny, musical has been a West End fixture for many years.

The touring production featured Lynn Paul when it last came to the Grand Theatre and now Tamworth-based Niki Evans takes on the role of the broken-hearted Liverpudlian mother, singing Tell Me It's Not True and Marilyn Monroe. Blood Brothers is at the Grand from Monday to the following Saturday.

Meanwhile, RSC and Star Wars actor Oliver Ford Davies plays the title role in wartime weepy Goodnight Mister Tom, a new stage adaptation of Michelle Margrave's novel until Saturday.

Classic romantic

One of the country's most innovative and popular dance companies, Matthew Bourne's New Adventures, return to Birmingham Hippodrome on Tuesday with a radical new interpretation of Cinderella. He has won praise and acclaim for his reworking of Swan Lake and the New Adventures' versions of Edward Scissorhands, The Nutcracker and Dorian Gray.

His revamp of Cinderella tells the story against the background of Blitz-era London with Prokofiev's classic romantic score the soundtrack to Cinderella's journey through the blackout to find romance with a dashing young RAF pilot. It is staged at the Hippodrome to Saturday, February 19.

Craig Revel Horwood's flamboyant revival of 1980s musical Chess, which Tim Rice wrote with the male half of Abba, is at the Hippodrome to this Saturday. Shona White is the woman caught between Russian and American chess grandmasters. The stand out song is I Know Him So Well.

There is a series of one-nighters at Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre. On Friday Roger Dean and the Lazy Boys present their tribute to a country music legend in The Johnny Cash Story. The Real Deal Comedy Jam is hosted by Kat B on Saturday and feature London comic Kane Brown, Canadian Jag Hankas, American Nema Williams, who is one of P Diddy's Bad Boys of Comedy, and New Yorker Frantz Casseus.

Dance sensations Flawless, from Britain's Got Talent, perform their variety of dazzling dance styles on Sunday night.

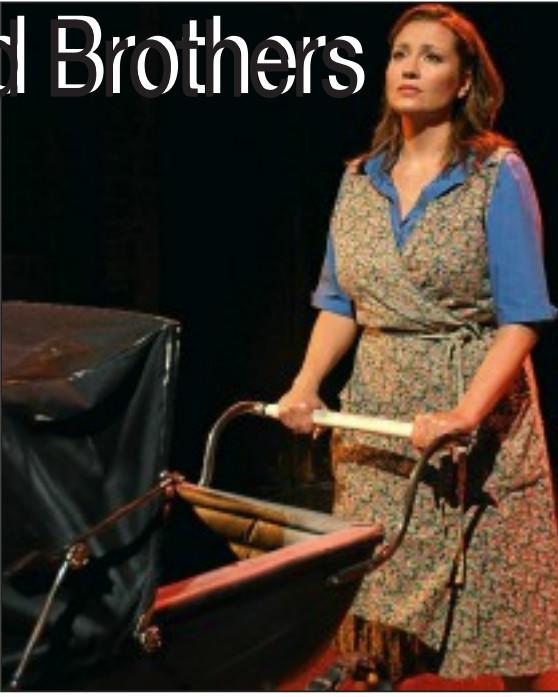
Steve Delaney brings his BBC Radio 4 comedy character, the language mangling former variety star

Former X Factor finalist Niki Evans, who plays the key role of Mrs Johnstone in Blood Brothers at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre

Count Arthur Strong there on Monday for his Command Performance.

Birmingham Rep's first off-site production is Kenny Baraka's musical post-apocalyptic tale The Rememberers. The one hour tale of a teenager who holds the key to mankind's future will be at a warehouse at the AE Harris Building in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter to February 19. Contact the box office on 0121 236 4455.

Anton De Beke and Erin Boag from Strictly Come Dancing are Puttin' On The Ritz in matinee and evening performances at the Symphony Hall this Saturday. Elkie Brooks is in concert at



Birmingham Town Hall on Saturday. Then the venue hosts schoolchildren from across the city at 3.15pm and 6pm on Sunday for the children's musical fantasy Romany Wood in aid of Birmingham St Mary's Hospice.

Gareth Gates duets with fellow West End star Scarlett Strallen in the Valentine's at the Musicals concert at Birmingham's Symphony Hall and The Creole Choir of Cuba are at the Town Hall. Both are on Monday.

Birmingham School of Acting's spring season includes Jewish drama A Dybbuk in the main house at The Crescent Theatre, Birmingham, to

Saturday. During the same period BSA perform adults' only drama Piano/Forte in the Crescent's Ron Barber Studio.

Masked theatre group Vamos look at nurses during the Second World War with song and dance in Nursing Lives at Wolverhampton's Arena Theatre on Wednesday.

There is a choice of comedy tonight (Thursday) with Freak Like Me presenter Russell Kane at The Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, Mock The Week irregular Zoo Lyons at Brum's Glee Club and John Shuttleworth at Birmingham Town Hall.

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Thursday 14th April BRIDLINGTON - THE BALMORAL HOTEL			5 Days £219
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Monday 25th April THEATRE & DINNER TOUR			
Tuesday 26th April THEATRE & DINNER TOUR - EASTER WEEK	5 Days £195		
Wednesday 27th April BLACKPOOL silver service, excursions, entertainment, indoor pool, en-suite, entertainment, excursions, indoor pool, single room supplement £25.00			
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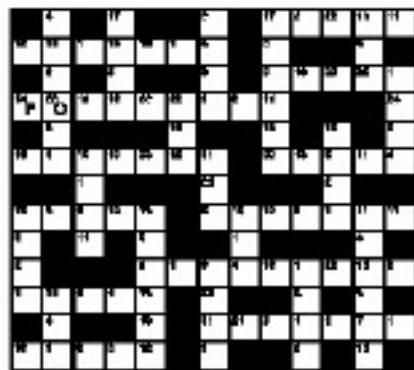


Brain Gym

No.103

Codeword

Each number in the grid corresponds with a letter or symbol. Use the numbers and symbols in the grid to find the code words.



LETTERCODE SOLUTION:

K	B	Y	N	R	V	G	L	Z	S	H	X
G	O	T	A	E	U	D	C	P	W	M	F



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Double Crossword

Crossword answers in capital letters - both in the same grid.

Cryptic Clues

Across

1. Precise to the dispensable to the nearest 10 (10)
4. A hill of mounds, apparently (8)
6. Keeping in mind a distant, unlikely (11)
8. Much deeper interests not shared, twice (11)
9. 1746. Campaign to clear the country, lastingly (9)
13. We need to be the part-time and realistic (6)
15. Although dimly, they can take advantage (increasingly) (9)
16. See 12 Across
18. About, uncertain, odd (7)
20. Classification by man, sometimes (11)
21. A series of events, for example (11)
22. Their new laws strands to fight (13)

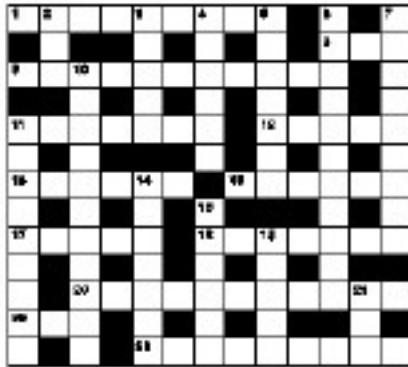
Quick Clues

Across

1. Brighten up (7)
4. Tires (7)
6. King penguin (7)
11. Green body (7)
12. Silliness (7)
13. Take notice (7)
16. Making clean (7)
17. Overripe (7)
18. Robins (7)
20. Upstage (7)
22. Germania (7)
23. Roman lines (7)

Down

2. Add to (10)
3. Medication (no 1) (9)
5. To make search (10)
7. A very good colour could be (10)
8. Not very hot (4-2)
9. Medicinal (10)
10. Used to (10)
11. The cure needs common sense (10)
14. See 10 Across
15. The holds (10)
17. Like (10)
19. Every household item (13-3)



LAST WEEK'S PUZZLES
CROSSWORD: Across: 1. Rainy days, 2. Weather, 3. Windy, 4. Windy, 5. Windy, 6. Windy, 7. Windy, 8. Windy, 9. Windy, 10. Windy, 11. Rainy, 12. Rainy, 13. Rainy, 14. Rainy, 15. Rainy, 16. Rainy, 17. Rainy, 18. Rainy, 19. Rainy, 20. Rainy, 21. Rainy, 22. Rainy, 23. Rainy, 24. Rainy, 25. Rainy, 26. Rainy, 27. Rainy, 28. Rainy, 29. Rainy, 30. Rainy, 31. Rainy, 32. Rainy, 33. Rainy, 34. Rainy, 35. Rainy, 36. Rainy, 37. Rainy, 38. Rainy, 39. Rainy, 40. Rainy, 41. Rainy, 42. Rainy, 43. Rainy, 44. Rainy, 45. Rainy, 46. Rainy, 47. Rainy, 48. Rainy, 49. Rainy, 50. Rainy, 51. Rainy, 52. Rainy, 53. Rainy, 54. Rainy, 55. Rainy, 56. Rainy, 57. Rainy, 58. Rainy, 59. Rainy, 60. Rainy, 61. Rainy, 62. Rainy, 63. Rainy, 64. Rainy, 65. Rainy, 66. Rainy, 67. Rainy, 68. Rainy, 69. Rainy, 70. Rainy, 71. Rainy, 72. Rainy, 73. Rainy, 74. Rainy, 75. Rainy, 76. Rainy, 77. Rainy, 78. Rainy, 79. Rainy, 80. Rainy, 81. Rainy, 82. Rainy, 83. Rainy, 84. Rainy, 85. Rainy, 86. Rainy, 87. Rainy, 88. Rainy, 89. Rainy, 90. 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Reviews: DVDs



Anna Paquin and Rachel Blanchard in a scene from Open House

Open House (18)
DESPITE the prominence of True Blood stars Anna Paquin and Stephen Moyer on the cover, they only feature on screen briefly as victims in Open House.

Perhaps Miss Paquin and her screen and real life partner Moyer were showing support for her brother Andrew Paquin, who directs this slow moving but efficient slasher thriller.

The main trio are Rachel Blanchard (from TV's *Clueless*) who as divorcee Alice is held prisoner in her own home by a psycho couple (Tricia Helfer from *Battlestar Galactica* and the quietly intense

Brian Geraghty) after an 'open house' viewing to sell her home results in a killer hiding in her basement.

The gruesome twosome – a true nympho-maniac and her dominated partner in crime – stab and slash every potential rescuer but then Alice attempts to form a relationship with her male captor.

It's fairly predictable stuff but well done.

However, the main interest for True Blood fans will be hearing Moyer using his native English accent rather than the southern drawl he adopts for HBO's saucy vampire thriller.

Takers (12)
This heist thriller reckons it's slick, stylish and cool, but derivative, clichéd and boring would be better adjectives.

A tough detective, played by Matt Dillon on auto-pilot, will not rest until he brings a gang of cocky bank robbers – including Paul Walker from *Fast & Furious*, Tip 'T.I.' Harris from TV's *Entourage* and Hayden Christensen from various Star Wars movies – to justice.

You've probably seen this story done before but much better featuring Pacino or De Niro.

Both movies are also available on Blu-ray.

Leon Burakowski



Matt Dillon who stars in Takers

Reviews: games

Dead Space 2 (18, EA)

IT'S basically Resident Evil in space though developers Visceral have taken the space ship location of Dead Space and expanded it to a whole city, known as The Sprawl.

Taking elements from the games Aliens vs Predator and Resident Evil, plus a whole slew of horror and sci-fi movie influences – chiefly Alien and The Thing – DS2 efficiently delivers the thrills and chills as survivor Isaac Clarke (we now see what he looks like), still haunted by visions of his dead girlfriend, must battle an onslaught of gruesome new Necromorphs.

These most unpleasant aliens use the bodies of their victims to warp and morph into monstrous creatures, including acid pukers and

zombie vampire babies. Not nice. There are a range of difficulty levels, with the top level being insanely hardcore, and you can play as the Necromorphs in multi-player mode.

It's tougher than the original and more time-consuming for those determined to get to the end. But by the time you've offed the zillionth Necromorph, you might start to yearn for the more rounded game experience of a Fallout or BioShock.

Reviewed on Xbox 360 this game is also available for PC and PS3.

Little Big Planet 2 (7, Sony)

Still one of the best reasons to buy a PS3, the Little Big Planet franchise steps up a gear with the iconic Sackboy now able to fashion all sorts

of games, not just the 2D platformers of the original LBP. It allows the gamer to bring their own ingenuity to this colourful universe, surely the way to go in a gaming world where too often the experience is still 'on rails'.

Once again, Stephen Fry provides the voice over as the Story Mode takes you through eight worlds and around 30 levels, punctuated by bonus levels inspired by other game styles.

Then begins the business of creating your own levels via the level editor. It's a steep learning curve but stick with it to get the most out of this game. As for Sackboy, isn't it time he got a few more powers... maybe that will come in Little Big Planet 3?

Leon Burakowski

medley received roars of appreciation from the audience.

Magic of Motown, The Grand Theatre

AN electric atmosphere was created from start to finish for this show.

It had a packed out audience of all ages on their feet for a well-deserved standing ovation.

A superb band captured the distinctive Detroit sound to perfection, recreating all-time favourites from The Temptations, The Four Tops, Diana Ross and The Supremes, Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder and many more.

However, on the sixth date of his Out Out tour, Flanagan had the whole crowd in fits of laughter throughout, regaling tales of his time as a teacher, of growing up in the East End, of previous relationships and of his wife and child.

He added that while most comedians had a catchphrase, he was hoping his Cockney gait would become his catchwalk.

Important questions were answered such as why teenage pregnancies are on the rise, and while Flanagan doesn't tell 'Joke Jokes', he can no doubt spin a yarn.

Micky Flanagan, Town Hall, Birmingham

SOMEWHERE

there's a mum and dad with a lot of explaining to do.

Cockney comic Micky Flanagan went through a whole host of topics during his sell-out Town Hall show, some of them not necessarily for the ears of the young girl that had been brought along by her parents. There was a lot of adult and sexual content in the show, not to mention the language.

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Mark Shipp

Reviews: live shows

Goodnight Mister Tom, Wolverhampton Grand Theatre

MICHELLE Magorian's much-loved children's book about a wartime evacuee and the grumpy old man who takes him in has great appeal, as shown by the near full house on opening night.

Thankfully, playwright David Wood and director Angus Jackson do it justice.

From the opening, as a line of children sent to rural Dorset to avoid the London blitz march along to their new billets to the sound of Gracie Fields song Wish Me Luck, the play establishes a past era where children say 'wizard' and the GP was likely a heavy smoker. Oliver Ford Davies is gently impressive as the gruff but kind-hearted Mister Tom, a man wounded by the loss of his wife and child many years before, who recognises a kindred spirit in timid young William Beech (excellent young actor Oliver Tritton Wheeler on Press night), whose bruises reveal his mother's abuse. All she sends with him is a Bible and a belt to beat

him with. Mister Tom's dog, Sammy, is represented very effectively in all his sniffing, tail-wagging canine character by puppeteer Laura Cubitt.

There is a fine ensemble to play the village children and community stalwarts and Max Longmuir shone as ebullient and erudite new best friend Zach. Matters take a grim turn when William is called back to London by his mother, the set clanking into a change from bright open stage to the boy's dungeon-like London abode.

Aoife Kavanagh's Mrs Beech is the more chilling, played not as a clear-cut villain but as a woman who is clearly seriously mentally ill. When Tom and William are finally reunited, it is hard to prevent a lump in the throat or a tear in the eye.

This is the first production from The Children's Touring Partnership, which aims to present high quality children's and family drama. They have certainly succeeded with this play. It continues until Saturday.

Leon Burakowski

Chess, Birmingham Hippodrome

THIS was no darrnce disaster, darling!

Famous for songs One in Bangkok and I Know Him So Well, the musical by Tim Rice and Abba's Bjorn and Benny has been choreographed by Strictly Come Dancing's Craig Revel Horwood.

It tells the story of two chess masters battling it out for the world championships, while at the same time fighting for the love of the same woman.

And what a show it was! Costumes were both extravagant and raunchy, and the way in which the chess pieces danced around the board was mesmerising.

A fine cast of West End stars has been assembled, with performances by Daniel Keoh and Shona White among the highlights. Poppy Tierney has a fantastic voice and deserved a bigger part. An initial problem with the male cast's diction was rectified for the second half and led to a rousing finale. It runs until April 12.

Mark Shipp

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HI I am Ellen 45, attractive with statuesque curvy figure looking for an uncomplicated relationship with understanding male friend. Call me. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 356135

FRIENDLY outgoing, sociable lady, 34 but looks mid 20's (its true). WLTM adventurous male 18 - 35, I'm open to most ages/things, happy to try most things. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 357561

WHITE 50's genuine modern West Brom female, divorced, easygoing, seeks fit modern male, 50-60 for LTR. Driver preferred. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358855

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SHROPSHIRE lady, 61, likes country-side, sea, travel, cooking, sewing, lived on farm, seeks special genuine gent for nice match. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 334241

YUMMY mummy looking for gent with GSOH to put much needed fun back into my life. No pressure just good honest fun. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 352823

LITTLE bit nice and definitely a little bit naughty! Imaginative curly blonde seeks male for kisses and cuddles. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 363428

VERY lonely young looking 40's female, solvent, OHAC, seeks younger male for chilled together. Status unimportant. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358267

SOPHIE 29 generously proportioned lady, 5ft 5ins, oval face, curly hair, looking for nice older male for good times and nice conversations. AKA. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 356133

42yr old Sagittarian 5ft 7ins, brown hair, blue eyes, seeks genuine, caring guy interested in fitness, meals out, country walks, gardening and travel. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358399

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LONELY blonde widow with no ties, looking for love and romance again with lots of TLC. WLTM similar man. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 355247

BUBBLY female, 42, young at heart, honest, caring, likes outdoors, cinema, theatre, meals out, seeks like-minded male/soul mate, 40-50. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 357919

CURVY female, romantic, warm and cuddly, seeks similar kind male for a loving relationship with lots of cuddles and kisses. Looks unimportant. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 351367

KIND romantic, loving lady, slight disability, seeks genuine male for romance. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 357751

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CURVY intelligent young widow, 50, blue eyes, short dark hair, lovely figure, seeks tall nicely made to enjoy life's pleasures with. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 353429

28YR old blonde, seeks fun loving, adventurous male for relationship. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 380918

CONFIDENT full figured and all women, likes cosy nights in with that special person, looking for friendship maybe more. Age/looks unimportant. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 356133

DO you know what women want? 40yr old pettite lady needs spoiling and lots of love by attractive male, 45-55. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 327573

GORGEOUS 26 yr old independent female with lots to offer to the right person, seeks similar. Willing to travel. Any age/status welcome. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358141

SLIM 40, tall dark hair, lovely figure, seeks nice older male to enjoy life's pleasures with. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 353428

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YOUNG looking, pretty, female, 40, blonde, slim, no ties, N/S, seeks attractive, refined male for friendship/relationship. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 331315

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ATTRACTIVE female, 42, slim, brunette, no ties, likes travel, nights out; seeks male, 40-50 for LTR. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 327579

HELEN 38, one child, blonde hair, 5ft 6ins, slim, attractive, likes swimming, dancing, seeks male, 43-53 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 331399

ATTRACTIVE female, 45, slim, affectionate, intelligent, seeks honest, caring male for fun and friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 301001

LADY N/S, car owner, seeks lonely, retired gent with old fashioned values for friendship/days out and holidays. Stourbridge. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 354183

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TALL fit good looking friendly guy with GSOH, 49, seeks adventurous lady for fun only, daytime liaisons, Halesowen. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 357347

STEVE 54, seeks large, mature female, 35-65 for fun. Can travel. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 330103

MALE late 40's medium build, N/S, seeks female, 30-40 for friendship. Shropshire. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 354793

SINGLE dad, 46, average looks, N/S, 5ft 6ins. dark hair, likes music, country walks, pubs, clubs, seeks female, 35-50 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 356763

MATURE 40's, 5ft 5ins, medium build, fair hair, easygoing, honest, seeks nice female, 40-55 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 347729

DAVE 49, own home, likes pubs, clubs, dancing, meals out, seeks female, 38-48 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358089

MALE attractive, sociable guy, little naughty, seeking a special female for love and romance. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 358431

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CUDDLY lady, 50, honest, caring, GSOH, likes animals, music, nights in, seeks gentle, intelligent female, 36-46 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 322651

FATHE 50 plus, young at heart, 5ft 2ins, athletic, likes outdoors, music, movies, seeks male for LTR. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 324265

SYLVIE 59, N/S, long blonde hair, 5ft 2ins, slim, GSOH, likes cycling, walks, likes meat, seeks male for LTR. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 317475

MAGS 62, N/S, like minded, GSOH, 5ft 4ins, brown hair, slightly podgy, likes meat out, countryside, days out, nights in, seeks gent, 55-67 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 32652

MARIE 37, blonde hair, blue eyes, slim, likes clubs, pubs, walking, WLTM, some for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 326513

SYLVIA 59, N/S, long blonde hair, 5ft 2ins, slim, GSOH, likes cycling, walks, likes meat, seeks male for LTR. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 32887

YOUNG looking male, 50, seeks dark hair, female, 50, seeks male for fun relationship. Any area, can travel. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 311892

GAY male, 55, seeks similar gay male, 18-30 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: **0905 436 6562** Box No: 355301

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Mazda introduces high-spec Takuya special editions to run across three model ranges



There will be three different versions of the Mazda6 Takuya, offering high performance fun for larger families

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The Mazda2 Takuya is compact and sporty

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FOLLOWING on the success of the Takuya Special Edition Range introduced in mid-2010 for a limited period, Mazda is launching five 2011 'Takuya' models across the Mazda2, Mazda3 and Mazda6 line-ups with a total production volume of nearly 4,000 units.

The generously equipped Takuya models incorporate features normally only available with top-of-the-range derivatives.

Also displaying extra visual appeal with attractive pricing, the Takuya quintet is on sale now, offering Mazda customers great added value.

Sporty

Mark Cameron, sales director, Mazda UK, said: "The 2011 Mazda Takuya range offers buyers genuine exclusivity, evocative sports styling and enhanced equipment, while representing fantastic value for money."

"Previous special edition Mazda models have proved hugely popular, selling fast and boasting impressive residual values."

All Mazda Takuya models are also available with VAT fixed at the 2010 rate – this offer applies to the retail list price and excludes all factory fitted and dealer fitted options.

Priced from £11,949 on the road, the Mazda2 1.3-litre five-door Takuya is the entry point into the 2011 special edition range.

With a price tag just £110 more than the Tamura model, this Takuya boasts the addition of front fog lights, black sports trim, rear electric windows, automatic climate-control air-conditioning, a Parrot Bluetooth hands-free kit and a new rear bumper sports trim – to offer truly remarkable value.

Hatch

Standard equipment also includes 16-inch alloy wheels, a sports styling kit (incorporating a rear spoiler and side skirts) and sports headlights.

The interior benefits from side and curtain airbags, a trip computer, leather steering wheel and gear knob, steering wheel remote audio controls and four audio speakers.

For 2011 the Mazda2 Takuya is available in a choice of five colours, including the new Burundy Red Mica.

Powered by a 1.3-litre, 84PS engine, the Mazda2 Takuya is a lively performer that is also remarkably frugal. It accelerates to 62mph in 13.6 seconds, while recording 55.4mpg (combined cycle) and producing just 119g/km of CO₂.

Consumers requiring a

larger but equally agile hatchback will find the 105ps, 1.6-litre Mazda3 Takuya an ideal car.

Costing £1,145 more than the TS model on which it is based, this Takuya boasts specifications that includes 17-inch alloy wheels, sports styling kit, front fog and LED rear lights, plus automatic dusk-sensing lights and rain-sensing wipers.

For £1,050 more than the TS models, all three variants benefit from the fitment of 18-inch alloy wheels, a sports grille, front fog lights, privacy glass and dusk-sensing headlights.

The interior features an alloy pedal set, half-leather heated seats, auto-dimming rear view mirror, dual-zone automatic climate control air-conditioning, an integrated Bluetooth system and a six-disc CD changer.

A choice of four metallic, mica or pearlescent paint colours is offered free of charge.

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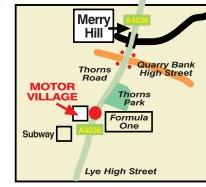
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sport

Best of the season as Hawks wing in with nine

Girls League

Gornal Girls 0 Halas Hawks 9
HALAS HAWKS under-12s girls turned in their most impressive performance of the season in this cup game.

In the first half, they scored goals through Bethan Bryan (2) and Sophie Heaslegrave as well as hitting the post twice and creating numerous other chances.

Halas began the second half slowly, but went on to score further goals through Louise Troman (2), Beth Bryan, Lucy Heaslegrave, Amy Plummer and Isobelle Loveridge.

This was an excellent team

performance with the defence, led by Elizabeth Thomas, also playing its part.

Boys League
Halesowen Town 1
Halas Hawks East 1

The under-nines East fell behind early on when the home side scored after a corner.

Halas came more into the game as the first half continued and equalised from Oliver Miller, who put the ball away after harrying a defender into an error.

Both teams competed well in the second half but found the respective keepers in good form.

Halas players of the match were Josh Smith & Tom Baker.

Kewford Eagles South 0

Halas Hawks East 3

The under-10s East were rarely threatened in a game they controlled from the start. After missing several chances Halas finally went ahead shortly before half-time with a cross-shot from Joshua Parsons.

The second half followed a similar pattern and the second goal came after the Kewford keeper spilled a long-range Jayden Wyman shot which

James Rigby scored the third Halas goal from close range.

Hasbury Rangers 4

Halas Hawks 1

Josh Horton got the under-11s' goal in their defeat away to Hasbury.

Halas Hawks West 3 Perton 3

A see-saw match ended with Perton scoring the final goal to earn a draw against the Halas under-12s West.

The home side created numerous chances in the first half but took only one, through Joe Price.

Perton started the second period on top and were soon leading, but goals from Nathan

Postin and their player of the match Jamie Theodosi gave them the advantage once more before the late equaliser.

West Hagley 4 Halas Hawks 3

A goal 10 minutes from time condemned the under-13s to defeat in a lively match.

Hagley scored within a minute of the kick-off only for Jack Guest to level. A lively Halas team then laid siege to the Hagley goal with Tom Bagley guiding the ball over the line to make it 2-1.

Hagley equalised but Halas were ahead at the break after Liam Holmes' inswinging corner

found its way into the net.

Halas were pinned back in the second half, Hagley equalising and then sealing the win. Halas player of the match was Tom Bagley.

Warley Borough 1

Halas Hawks 3

The under-14s continued their winning ways with a victory against Warley Borough. Halas goals came from Kane Campbell, Jake Waller and Dan Willets.

Castle Cobras 1 Halas Hawks 4

A Guy Millward hat trick set up the under-16s for a 4-1 win against Castle Cobras. Ben Hughes scored the fourth.

extended that lead to 19-9.

Stourbridge were given hope when Matt Riley was sent to the sin bin and during that 10 minutes Liam Worley was driven over from a lineout drive.

But the missed conversion forced Stourbridge to run late penalties rather than take kickable shots. Good defence kept them out.

Juniors pick up speeding tickets

HALESOWEN swimmers exceeded all expectations in the Redditch B junior friendly gala.

Saturday's event was a B Grade format with no points awarded to swimmers exceeding set time limits.

The Halesowen swimmers landed 26 personal best times out of a possible 32, resulting in 23 "speeding tickets"! Despite forfeiting so many points, the team finished third.

Double tickets went to James Cuthbert and Connor Fell in the freestyle and backstroke, Emma Elwell in the backstroke and breaststroke, Emily Bate in the backstroke and butterfly and Emma Bird and George Westwood in the breaststroke and butterfly.

Tickets were also awarded to Ruby Fell, Kathryn Kelly, Jennifer Wenman and Thomas Benson in the freestyle, India Hanke and Molly Kelly in the backstroke, Lauren Hill, Katy Morrice and Zac Rollason in the breaststroke and Talia Mitchell and Ben Meakin in the butterfly.

Maximum

Swimmers winning maximum points were James Westwood in the backstroke, Zac Rollason in the butterfly and Jennifer Wenman and Rhys Richards in the freestyle.

The relay teams were unbeatable, winning maximum points in every event and included Indu Appanna, Emma Baker, Kitty Luscombe, Paige Robbins, Lila Shaaban, Rachel Weller, Sam Bailey, Jakob Baker, Daniel Corcoran, George Davies, Mark Laing, James Perry, Jack Simpson, and Jack Vale.

Several swimmers were representing the club for the first time: Emily Bate, Kathryn Kelly, Talia Mitchell, Katy Morrice, Paige Robbins, Lila Shaaban, Sam Bailey, Thomas Benson, Ben Meakin, Jakob Baker and Jack Simpson.

Scores: Redditch 178pts, Worcester 173, Halesowen 161, Haden Hill 147, Blyth Barracudas 142.

Dudley hit for six

Dudley O Bloxwich 6

DUDLEY ladies hockey were heavily beaten at home by Bloxwich.

Amie Lawrence opened the scoring before captain Jill Ricketts put a flick in the bottom corner.

Goals for Lawrence and Nic Shut-Nall made it four while Charlotte Mincher ran riot down the left and scored twice.

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Flood of points as DK hit back to win

Lichfield 26

Dudley Kingswinford 52

DUDLEY Kingswinford survived a scare for the second consecutive week but eventually powered through to see off Lichfield at Cooke Fields.

The hosts led by 15-0 and 21-10 but DK, who narrowly overcame Camp Hill at Heathbrook a week earlier, kept their cool to maintain their 100 per cent record.

DK made a number of changes to their team with the returning Stefan Shillingford, Al Francis and Matt Farrington all included, writes Ian Bratt.

From the kick-off the blustery wind played its part and Lichfield enjoyed early possession, converting a fourth-minute penalty to start the scoring.

Held

Gareth Bown saw a penalty held up in the wind as DK struggled to make their mark – not a problem Lichfield were experiencing as they took an 8-0 lead through an unconverted Richard Burton try.

Against the wind DK were struggling to wrestle possession from the home side and another score duly arrived on 20 minutes when fly-half Josh Massey crossed and converted his own try.

A much-needed DK response came soon after and it was captain Pete Knight who provided it after the pack drove to the line.

Just a few minutes later the visitors were there again, with Stefan Thorp touching down although, as with Knight's try, the conversion

failed and DK were still slightly adrift at 15-10. Back came resurgent Lichfield to extend their advantage with two Josh Massey penalties to make it 21-10 at half-time.

DK's 16-game winning run looked to be under threat but, with the wind behind them, they produced their very best form in the second half and ran in 42 points.

Rolling

A Bown penalty got the ball rolling, followed soon after by a try from the same player.

Tom Paulson was driven over to extend Lichfield's lead to 26-18, but within 12 minutes DK were just a point behind thanks to Tui Asi Pito's rampaging try.

Two more Bown penalties gave DK a five-point lead, duly extended by two blistering tries in the space of a minute by Jon Higgins and Stefan Shillingford.

With just a minute to go James Jefferson touched down to add gloss to the scoreline, with Bown converting for a somewhat flattering 52-26 victory.



The elusive Jak Davis twists and turns in a bid to avoid the Lichfield defence. Pictures: Ian Jackson

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